THE GENERALS’ WAR

The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf

by Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor
CENTCOM commander was concerned, communications with the White House were for him to handle.

But the larger question was whether the Marines had been too successful in their stunning attack. Schwarzkopf recalled after the war that he had assumed the Marine attack would set up the Iraqis for a knock-out blow. But the Marines had routed the Iraqis so quickly that the Army had not yet built up a head of steam for what was to be the main attack. The outcome of the offensive to liberate Kuwait was a foregone conclusion. The question now was whether the Army would be able to destroy the Republican Guard before the war’s denouement.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textbf{Fragplan 7}

\textit{VII Corps Destroys RGFG NLT EENT 27 FEB [VII Corps Destroys Republican Guard Forces Command Not Later Than Nautical Twilight, Feb. 27].}

— Third Army
Order to VII Corps, February 25

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HEN THE MARINES began their attack on the Saddam Line, John Yeosock was overseeing preparations for the Army attack from Lucky Main, the Army’s command post in an apartment complex on the outskirts of Riyadh. The three-star general looked haggard and drawn. Yeosock had been flown to Germany in mid-February for emergency gall bladder surgery and been temporarily replaced by Schwarzkopf’s hard-charging deputy, Lt. Gen. Cal Waller. But Yeosock had insisted on getting out of his hospital bed and returning to Riyadh for the war. After all the months of preparation, he was not about to miss the main event. To Schwarzkopf, letting Yeosock resume his post seemed to be the right way to reward him for his loyalty, but the decision would rebound in ways the commander could not foresee.\textsuperscript{1}

To Yeosock and his chief operations deputy, Steven Arnold, it looked like it was going to be a long week. Each of the services was running its own style of race. While the Marines had planned a sprint to the gates of Kuwait City, the Army foresaw a marathon; it had farther to go and was convinced it was about to lock horns with the premier fighting force in the third world.
As the battle staff assembled at Lucky Main, the acetate overlays draped over the maps of Iraq indicated that the allies had outsmarted the Iraqis, who had anticipated that they would be attacked along the Wadi al-Batin, as well as from the sea and the allied positions near the Saudi-Kuwait border.

To defend against such an attack, the Iraqis stacked five Republican Guard and regular army armored and mechanized divisions, as well as lesser units, on either side of the wadi along its entire route. To protect the vital communications hub at Basra, three Republican Guard infantry divisions covered the western approaches to the city, with a heavy guard division, the Hammurabi, deployed in reserve. It was a well-laid-out defense against an enemy that was determined to attack along the wadi and which depended largely on ground power. But it was totally inadequate against the alliance with total air superiority that planned to attack from the western desert.

Taking the floor, Arnold explained to the battle staff that the Army campaign to destroy the Republican Guard would take seven to ten days. In keeping with Schwarzkopf's plan, elements of the XVIII Airborne Corps in the far west — the 82nd Airborne, the 6th French Division, and the 101st Airborne — had already begun to move north. To get astride the potential escape route along the Euphrates River in the west, CENTCOM figured, the allied forces in the west would need all the time they could get, so they began their assault on the morning of the Marine attack. John Tidelli's 1st Cavalry Division had also begun to attack the Iraqi defenses at the wadi, but his assault was only a feint, designed to reinforce the Iraqis' mind-set that the wadi was the main avenue for the American attack.

The Army units that were to take the battle to the Republican Guard — the XVIII Airborne Corps's tank-heavy 24th Division, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and Franks's VII Corps — were not scheduled to kick off their attack until the morning of February 25, the idea being that the delay would fool the Iraqis into thinking the main attack was to the east.

To coordinate the Army's destruction of the Republican Guard, Arnold told his staff that he planned to fly to the front on the third day of the ground war with an updated "complan," contingency plan. That way, the Army, based on the latest intelligence, would have time to organize its attack for the climactic battle.²

It was only hours after Arnold outlined the timetable when Schwarzkopf called. With the Marines bursting through the Iraqi defenses, the CENTCOM commander wanted to know if Yeosock could launch his entire force on February 24. In all its contingency planning, the Army had never anticipated that it would have to speed up its attack plans because the Iraqi defense would collapse in the face of the Marines' attack.

Yeosock immediately relayed the request. At 9:30 AM, Yeosock placed separate calls to Luck and Franks, asking whether their corps could attack on two hours' notice.

As nervous as he was about taking on the Iraqis, moving up the attack was no problem for Luck. The reconnaissance mission he had ordered had shown the desert in front of his XVIII Airborne Corps to be largely devoid of enemy soldiers, and much of his force was already on the move.

But the way Franks had planned the VII Corps attack, slamming the Army attack into fast-forward was not going to be easy. Franks's two-pronged plan to assault the Iraqi front-line defenses west of the Wadi al-Batin, launch a parallel armored attack west of these fortifications, and unite the forces in a three-division fist to take on the Republican Guard required careful synchronization. Convinced he was outnumbered, Franks wanted to mass his forces before the VII Corps got into some heavy fighting, and he did not want the outside armored divisions to get too far ahead of the inside divisions as they made their way through the Iraqi defenses. The VII Corps commander saw the Iraqis as an Arab version of the Soviet Army and planned to fight them just as he would take on the Red Army, with massive firepower and careful coordination. He would maneuver his forces into position, concentrate the corps, and attack. Franks expected to take two days to fight his way through the Iraqi front-line defense and another six days to destroy the Republican Guard and mop up any enemy forces that remained.

Franks gave a tentative yes to an early attack, but consensus builder that he was, launched into a hurried series of consultations with his commanders, before giving the final okay. He had counted on daylight to breach the Iraqi fortification and hoped the assault could get under way as soon as possible. It would be getting dark by 5 PM.³

As the troops waited to launch their long-planned attack, soldiers burned envelopes from home, preferring to sacrifice the mementos than risk having them fall into the hands of an Iraqi captor.

Finally, after Schwarzkopf consulted with Washington and the Arab members of the coalition, the word came down: the attack was to begin at 3 PM. There would not be much daylight, but the VII Corps would make the best of it.
Major General Rhame’s 1st Mechanized Infantry Division struck the first blow for the VII Corps. At 2:30 PM, Rhame’s five artillery brigades unleashed a furious barrage against the poorly manned and ill-equipped Iraqi defenders west of Wadi al-Batin. It was one of the most intense bombardments in modern warfare. For half an hour, the din of exploding shells rocked the desert. The brigades fired 6,136 artillery rounds and 414 rockets to smother any Iraqi artillery pieces that might somehow have escaped the allied air bombardment. Then the corps’ combat engineers moved in to cut twenty-four lanes through the minefields and fortifications.

Under Franks’ plan, Rhame’s division would lead the eastern prong of the corps’ attack: a headlong plunge into the Iraqi fortifications. Then Rupert Smith’s British 1st Armored Division would exploit the breach made by its American cousins, pass through Rhame’s lines, and attack to the east to protect the VII Corps’ right flank. As Rhame’s division pounded the Iraqis, Smith’s Division drove fifty miles to the edge of the battlefield, abandoning earlier plans to haul the armor to the battle area on tank transporters to save wear and tear on the engines.

The western prong of the VII Corps’ attack, led by Col. Donald Holder’s 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, swept around the Iraqi fortifications. Ron Griffith’s 1st Armored Division and “Butch” Funk’s 3rd Armored Division followed behind, their brigades in single file in a huge armored column that was twenty miles wide and forty miles long.

To keep up morale and soothe the soldiers’ nerves, Funk arranged for the 3rd Armored Division Band to serenade the armored column as it rumbled through the Saudi berm. Dressed in the bulky chemical-protective suits, the band played “In the Mood” and the theme music from Lawrence of Arabia and Patton. With only little opposition directly ahead, the apprehensions about the Iraqis gave way to relief that the long wait was finally over.

As night fell, Franks faced his first critical command decision: whether to press ahead or pause until morning. The main problem was not the Iraqis: they were putting up a meager resistance. The difficulties arose from a battlefield strewn with exploded debris and unexploded munitions, the haunting worry about friendly fire, and a war plan that had never been practiced in darkness. Rhame’s 1st Mechanized Infantry Division and Smith’s 1st British Armored Division had conducted a full-scale dress rehearsal of the complicated maneuver of having British forces move through the American lines, but they had never practiced it at night.

For a VII Corps staff that had an almost obsessive concern with holding down casualties, that was a major worry. Col. Stan Cherry, Franks’s chief operations officer, worried that the attack on the Iraqi fortifica-
tions was getting to be “too hard.” In the darkness, one of Rhame’s tanks had already fired off a round at Funk’s 3rd Armored Division and an Apache helicopter had fired back. Cherie recommended that the VII Corps halt its attack for the night and renew it at first light. Not everyone in VII Corps agreed with the delay. Brig. Gen. John Landry, the VII Corps chief of staff, was frustrated. The attack had just gotten under way and now Cherie was talking about stopping for the night. But Franks supported Cherie. Tomorrow would be another day. Franks would rather be safe than sorry.

With Franks determined to concentrate his forces, his decision to hold up Rhame’s attack affected the entire VII Corps. Franks decided to halt the western prong of his attack — Holder’s 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment and the armored divisions rolling behind — as well. He was waiting for the slowest piece to get through the gap.4

Cherie called Arnold later that night and informed him the VII Corps was suspending the breach of the obstacles until dawn of the next day because of the difficulty in operating in the dark. Arnold concurred. The ground war was still very young and there was no need to take unnecessary risks. Arnold reported his decision to Yeosock and instructed his staff to pass the word to Schwarzkopf’s headquarters.

But Arnold recalled after the war that he did not realize that Franks was planning to suspend his entire attack. He thought that Franks intended to allow Holder’s regiment to press on and clear the way so that Griffith’s and Funk’s armored divisions could leap ahead the next day. There was a disconnect between the VII Corps command in the field and their Army superior in Riyadh.

That Franks was not prepared to launch his attack at night is surprising given that the Army had long concluded that American superiority in night-vision technology made night attacks preferable to daylight ones. Coordinating a night attack with a foreign ally, even a NATO member that the Army had worked alongside for years, was no easy task, but it was doable. The larger problem was that Franks had built an overly elaborate plan for a two-pronged attack that could not be easily adapted. Another problem was that nobody bothered to tell Schwarzkopf about the decision, setting the stage for one of his volcanic eruptions.

TROUBLE AT THE TOP

The next morning when Schwarzkopf’s staff assembled in the war room at the Saudi Ministry of Defense, Lt. Col. Joe Purvis was puzzled by the map. The Marines were racing ahead.

Gary Luck’s XVIII Airborne Corps was also leaping through western Iraq. The immediate impediment for the XVIII Corps was not the Iraqis, but weather, logistics, and the generous supply of cluster munitions the Air Force had sprinkled through Iraq. Unlike Franks, Luck had no compunction about splitting up his combat forces in the strategic void that was western Iraq.

The French 6th Division, reinforced with the 82nd Airborne, was attacking in the far western desert to secure the flank. Maj. Gen. Binme Peay’s 101st Airborne had flown north to Cobra, a fire base it set up ninety-three miles deep in Iraq. Fog had briefly delayed the 101st’s jump to Cobra. But by the end of G day the division had moved 200,000 gallons of fuel to the fire base, using not only all of its helicopters but a huge convoy from Saudi Arabia. It was the largest air assault in Army history and gave the division a staging area for launching attacks in western Iraq and attacking Highway 8, the east-west route along the Euphrates.

Racing ahead with his fuel trucks, McCaffrey’s division was roaring northward, with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment providing protection to its flank. McCaffrey was speeding toward the Euphrates River at a remarkable thirty miles an hour over rocky terrain. McCaffrey was hurrying to link up with Peay’s 101st, cut Highway 8, and then turn east to attack the Republican Guard.

It looked like just about everyone but Franks was attacking. The VII Corps positions had not moved overnight.

Purvis approached Tim Sullivan, the British member of the Jedi team. Sullivan, Purvis said, should find out why the British 1st Armored Division was still in Saudi Arabia. Schwarzkopf would want to know why the attack was not going forward. Sullivan made a quick check and was relieved to find out the problem was not with the British. They were waiting for the Americans to finish cutting a path through the Iraqi defenses.

When Schwarzkopf entered the war room at 8AM and saw that the VII Corps battle lines had not changed, he exploded. Get Yeosock on the telephone, the commander barked. Schwarzkopf demanded to know why the VII Corps forces were not deep into Iraq. Schwarzkopf had been angry with Franks before but now his frustration was boiling over. There was a fundamental discrepancy between the ways Schwarzkopf and Franks saw the battlefield. From his vantage point in Riyadh, Schwarzkopf was receiving reports from across Iraq, and it was clear the Iraqis were cracking. By staggering the Army attack to follow the Marines, Schwarzkopf had started late. He was now flogging the VII Corps as hard as he could to make up the lost ground. If Franks was not capable of
keeping up the pace, Schwarzkopf would replace him with a commander who was.

Yeosock deflected Schwarzkopf’s anger on VII Corps. He never mentioned that the Army higher-ups in Riyadh had approved Franks’s decision to suspend Rame’s breach or suggested that there had been any confusion in the calls between Franks’s staff and Arnold.

The VII Corps was not Schwarzkopf’s only worry. He was also concerned about the Egyptians. When the Egyptians attacked on G day, the Iraqis lit fire trenches in front of them, which had enough crude oil left in them to create an intimidating flaming wall. For the Egyptians, there was only one thing to do: wait for the trench fire to burn itself out. They were moving more slowly than the VII Corps, and there was no chance that they could help protect the Marines’ left flank. As unhappy as he was with the performance of the Egyptians, Schwarzkopf felt there was little he could do about it.

Schwarzkopf turned to Sullivan. Could the British sweep across southern Kuwait after they passed through Rame’s lines and pick up the slack from the Egyptians?

Sullivan went off to discuss the matter with Peter de la Billière, the senior British commander. But the British commanders were not eager to take on the mission. They figured it would strain logistics, open the British flank to a potential counterattack by the Republican Guard, and create political problems within the coalition. After he returned, Sullivan told Schwarzkopf that the British did not favor the idea but would make sure the mission was accomplished if Schwarzkopf ordered it.

Schwarzkopf deferred to the British. The Egyptian attack would go forward, but at its own pace, despite the fact that this left the Marine flank unprotected. Schwarzkopf had not expected much from the Egyptians and they had proved him right.5

At Franks’s command post, in the early morning of February 25, word began to filter in that Schwarzkopf was not happy with the pace of the attack. Franks, however, was not worried about the heat from Riyadh. Yeosock indicated to Franks that he could handle Schwarzkopf. The VII Corps commander figured his problems were in front of him, not back in Riyadh.

As dawn broke, Rame’s 1st Mechanized Infantry Division cleared lanes through the minefields and instead of sending troops in to clear the trenches of Iraqi soldiers, Rame sent armored bulldozers to plow over the trench line, entombing any Iraqis who resisted or were too slow to surrender.

The armored bulldozers were not a novel killing machine. They were used in both World War II and Vietnam for the same purpose. Nor were they more brutal than the pounding the Iraqi front lines took from artillery, tons of bombs, fuel-air explosives, and napalm used by allied forces. The division’s efforts to publicize its exploits after the war backfired when news reports said that thousands of Iraqi troops might have been buried alive. A classified log prepared by the division officers at the time, however, put the number of Iraqis buried at 150, and after the war, the Iraqis managed to unearth only several dozen bodies.6

With the way cleared by Rame’s men, Smith began to move the British 1st Armored Division through the gaps in the Iraqi defenses. The maneuver was complicated in the best of circumstances. In column, Smith’s division covered an area about forty miles long and fifteen miles wide. Moving that big a force through the breach sites was like pouring a bucket of water into a small funnel, but it became even more difficult after Franks came on with a new plan to build up his force for the expected encounter with the Republican Guard.

Franks had hoped that after the start of the ground war Schwarzkopf would put Tilelli’s 1st Cavalry Division under his control, but Schwarzkopf was not convinced that Franks needed the division and was holding it in reserve in case the Egyptians faltered. The CENTCOM commander felt Franks’s appetite for additional combat power was insatiable. Like the Civil War general George B. McClellan, he always painted his enemy ten feet tall.

Denied the 1st Cavalry, Franks improvised. Helicoptering in, he met Rame and told him that instead of guarding the gap in the Iraqi fortifications he would be heading north to join the attack on the Republican Guard. That was welcome news to Rame, who desperately wanted to keep his division in the fight. Yet it meant that two divisions, not one, would have to share the lanes the combat engineers had cleared through the Iraqi defenses. To accommodate the change in plans, Smith cut his division in half. He sent his combat forces through and held up moving his logistical units so that Rame could begin to move his combat units.

The result was not pretty, Smith recalled after the war. The British forces in the breach shifted to the eastern part of the opening, and Rame’s division began moving through the lanes in the west. The result was a huge rolling traffic jam. There were columns of vehicles going in all directions. All told, it would take the British fourteen hours to get all of their units through the breach.7

But it was the western prong of the corps’s attack that saw the first real action. Holder’s regiment had barely begun to lead the armored column
north when the VII Corps received the initial intelligence that the Iraqis were beginning to respond to the allied ground attack. A photo from a JSTARS radar surveillance plane showed an Iraqi brigade moving westward along an oil-covered sand road toward the desert town of Al Busayyah. The information was sent to Franks’s command at 6:35 AM.

According to VII Corps logs, Franks’s command interpreted the movement of the brigade as an indication that the Iraqis had identified the VII Corps as the allies’ main effort and were rushing to block their advance and defend the western flank of the Iraqi army. Interrogations of Iraqi officers by Army intelligence after the war, however, showed that the Iraqi countermove was extremely modest, based on a total misunderstanding of the allied strategy and all but impossible to execute in the face of allied airpower. Sending the brigade forward to stop the allies was like waving a handkerchief to ward off a blow from a sledgehammer.8

The forty-two-year-old colonel who commanded the brigade from Iraq’s 52nd Armored Division told his American captors that all his battalion commanders were reservists and his brigade had had no artillery or helicopters. The brigade had launched its counterattack because of a report that the Iraqi front lines had been breached by a French force of eight tanks and four armored personnel carriers and had no idea that it was on a collision course with Holder’s 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. His plan was to block one of the roads from Al Busayyah, a town to the west that was defended by a small Iraqi commando force. To defend the flank, the Iraqis planned to put brigades on both sides of the road from Al Busayyah, facing due west. That meant the Iraqis were perpendicular to the direction of the allied attack.

Thinking he was taking on a relatively light force, the Iraqi brigade commander had moved his speedier armored personnel carriers to the head of his force, holding his tanks back for the next morning. But American A-10s found the brigade’s armor and blasted a battalion of T-55 tanks.

Racing up the road in the driving rain, Holder’s regiment surprised the Iraqis as they were trying to dig in with picks and shovels and quickly destroyed what was left of the hapless brigade. According to the CIA, the Iraqis lost fifty-one armored personnel carriers, twenty-two tanks, and one ZSU-24 antiaircraft gun.

The devastation of the brigade pointed to an underlying problem with the Iraqi army’s tactics for fighting in the desert. Many of the Iraqi forces were anchored on the few roads interlacing the area, which they used to orient themselves in the desert and distribute supplies. They assumed that since it was hard for them to navigate far from the roads, there was no possibility the allies could do so either. And with the first reports that the allies were attacking in the west, the Iraqis rushed to defend the east-west roads. That the Americans could launch an attack across the open desert seemed too fantastic to be taken seriously.9

While Holder’s regiment made short work of the Iraqis, some of the armored forces traveling behind him were far more cautious. As the most western division in the VII Corps’s attack, Griffith’s 1st Armored Division had the farthest to go to get to the Republican Guard. It was like the outer ring of a great wheel rolling east.

But unlike Holder, Griffith fought a very deliberate war. After the division had rolled over the understrength Iraqi 26th Division, there was only one real enemy position standing in its way to the Republican Guard positions: the town of Al Busayyah.

Al Busayyah had been turned into a massive logistics dump and stocked with 100 tons of ammunition, enough for six months to a year of fighting for the nearby Iraqi divisions. Army intelligence had identified it as the headquarters of the 26th Division.

The beleaguered town had been blasted by the division’s Apache helicopters. Griffith could have surrounded the town with a small detachment and ordered the rest of the division to bypass it. But as he came upon the town on the afternoon of February 25, he decided to seize it, even if it meant holding up his entire division — more than 8,000 vehicles and 17,000 soldiers — to do it.

Hoping to hold down casualties, Griffith told Franks that instead of taking the town right away he wanted to pummel Al Busayyah throughout the night and occupy it at daylight. Franks approved the attack plan. As in his decision to suspend Ramee’s attack on February 24, Franks preferred waiting to fighting at night.

That night, the 1st Armored unleashed a massive barrage, which reached a crescendo at 6 AM. Al Busayyah was pounded with 1,500 artillery shells and 350 rockets. In the morning, Griffith launched a two-brigade attack on what was left of the town. By 9 AM, however, the town was still not declared secure; so Griffith ordered a task force to mop up and resumed his march.

The division later dubbed the engagement the “Battle of Al Busayyah” and churned out elaborate graphics detailing the attack. However, the official U.S. Army history later referred to the engagement more accurately as “little more than a skirmish.”

The enemy, it was later determined, did not amount to much: one Iraqi infantry battalion, one commando battalion, and one company of
T-55 tanks. All told, the 1st Armored Division had destroyed eleven
T-55 tanks, six armored personnel carriers, and eleven trucks, and had
captured ninety-four prisoners.

Griffith explained after the war that he had wanted to ensure that the
Iraqis in Al Busayyah would not be able to lash out and disrupt the
corps’s supply line. But some of Holder’s officers were frustrated. To
pound an insignificant town into submission, Griffith had slowed the
VII Corps attack.  

As the VII Corps kept up its methodical attack, the XVIII Airborne
Corps was continuing to make good time. The 101st’s mission was to
prevent the Iraqis from sending reinforcements into the battle area or to
stop those in the battle area from trying to escape by going down High-
way 8, paralleling the Euphrates River. Peay’s Screaming Eagles, or at
least a small portion of them, were astride the road by the end of G day.

With the wind and rain interfering with helicopter flights, Peay’s initial
blocking force — an anti-armor company, two TOW infantry companies,
and some field artillery — numbered no more than 1,000 soldiers. The
soldiers attacked a few light trucks along Highway 8, but there was no sub-
stantial enemy resistance when they cut the road. Peay had barred one of
the Iraqis’ possible escape routes. But another escape route to the interior
of Iraq was open through Basra or over the nearby Hawr al Hammar
causeway if the Iraqis decided to retreat. Whether the Republican Guard
would stand fast and fight, launch a counterattack, or make a run for it was
not yet clear to the XVIII Airborne commanders.

As for Franks, his VII Corps had a number of contingency plans to
deal with possible Iraqi responses to the Army attack. Fragplan 7 was
his plan to take the battle to the Republican Guard if they stood and
fought. Instead of continuing on a northwest heading, the VII Corps
would pivot, head due east, and slam into the Iraqi divisions.

To help decide what plan to use, Franks arranged for an update from
Army intelligence on the status of the Republican Guard on the after-
noon of February 25. But before the intelligence came in, the VII Corps
received an order from the Third Army: “VII Corps Destroys RGFC
NLT EENT 27 FEB.”

The VII Corps had been ordered to destroy the Republican Guard
forces not later than nautical twilight on the evening of February 27.
Franks had not yet tangled with the Republican Guard or even selected a
contingency plan for attacking them, and the commanders in Riyadh were
telling him that the Guard had to be destroyed in the next two days.

In Riyadh, the reason for the order was clear. Under the pressure of the
Marine attack, Baghdad had begun withdrawing its forces from
Kuwait. To cover the withdrawal of their field army, the Iraqis hastily
deployed a blocking force to the west. It was imperative that Franks
move aggressively before the Iraqis could escape.

The western flank of the Iraqi defenses began to look like a giant
fishhook. Brigades of the Iraqi 52nd Mechanized Division, 12th Ar-
mored Division, and the Tawakalna Republican Guard Division moved
to hastily prepared defensive positions just east of the IPSA pipeline
road, the main north-south road, to form the shank of the fishhook.
Like the ill-fated brigade destroyed by Holder’s regiment, the Taw-
kalna Division covered all the minor roads coming east from Al Busay-
yah. The Medina Republican Guard Division, deployed to the right rear
of the new defense line, formed the hook.

The defensive line was spotty, lacked depth, and was laid out in a way
that made it difficult for the divisions to support each other. It was little
more than a thin line of tanks and armored personnel carriers punctu-
ated with gaps. Little artillery was shifted to support the defense. The
Iraqi emergency plan, which had completely reoriented the direction of
their defense, was no longer to draw the Americans into a prolonged
and bloody ground war; the Iraqis were trying to buy time for an escape.

Schwarzkopf knew the Army was pursuing a defeated foe, but Franks
was convinced that the Republican Guard was determined to stand fast
and slug it out with the Americans. As much as ever, Franks was deter-
mained to pull together his three-division fist before slamming into the
Republican Guard.

FIRST BLOOD

At 5:22 AM on February 26, Holder’s regimen in the vanguard of the
main American force received the long-awaited message over E-mail:
Fragplan 7 was now in effect. The Americans may have outgunned the
Iraqis, but the Army’s communications network was an antiquated pas-
tiche of technologies, more suited for defensive operations than for sup-
porting lightning thrusts into enemy territory. The Army’s FM radios
were thirty-five to forty years old and had limited range.

As a result, the VII Corps Tactical Operations Center sent messages
by electronic mail, using microwave antennas that were erected in the
desert as the American forces advanced. The message was received on a
mobile phone hooked into a computer.

But E-mail had its limitations. The communications link was easily
broken. The VII Corps headquarters rarely called on the field telephone to see if the E-mail messages were received, and there was no system of electronic confirmation to ensure that the communication had gotten through. The main communications channel the Army used to give its attack orders was not as good as a modern office fax.

Holder thought the VII Corps attack plan was perfectly suited for his regiment. In Europe, the role of the regiment had been to slow down a Warsaw Pact onslaught. Under Fragplan 7, the regiment’s role was reversed. It was to find the Iraqis so that the corps’s heavy divisions trailing behind could roll over them. But Franks did not want the regiment to impale itself on the superior force.

Holder used the concept of aircraft carrier warfare as a model for his tactics. Long-range helicopters would fly in front, much as the Navy’s F-14s would fly combat air patrols ahead of a carrier battle group to protect it from attack. Then the regiment’s ground forces would advance along a nineteen-mile front. Scouts in Bradleys, like destroyers at sea, would range ahead as the tanks followed behind. The regiment was to retain the freedom to maneuver and, if need be, be prepared to fall back. Not everyone in the Army believed that the regiment could perform such a delicate task without being eaten up by Iraqi armor. Holder had argued that it could, and now he would have to make good on that prediction.

With the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment as the vanguard, Funk’s 3rd Armored Division and Griffith’s 1st Armored Division would wheel to the east, while Rame’s 1st Mechanized Infantry Division moved north from the breach site to come on line with the two armored divisions. All three divisions were to then position themselves for the final eastward assault along a line in the desert the VII Corps dubbed Smash. When Holder found the Republican Guard, Franks’s three heavy divisions would be coiled and ready to strike the Iraqis with a balled fist. The British were to engage the Iraqis north of the breach site to protect the exposed right flank of the corps.

Before turning east, Holder ordered his staff to make sure the British had also been notified that Fragplan 7 was in effect. Under the plan, Holder’s sharp turn east would cross into the northern part of what would otherwise have been the British zone. The last thing Holder needed was to send his regiment crashing into the British force.

Holder was told it was a good thing the regiment had contacted the British. They had not yet gotten word of the change in plans. Army command and control was becoming a problem for fast-paced offensive operations in the vast desert.
The pivot east was the beginning of what was to become one of the VII Corps's most intense fights. As the regiment rolled east, the weather soon became a big problem. With the clouds and blowing sand, the regiment's aviation squadron was grounded about half the time. This deprived the regiment of the air scouts it needed.

Adding to the confusion, the VII Corps maps did not show the IPSA pipeline road, the shank of the fishhook just to the rear of the Tawakalna Division where the Iraqis had anchored their hasty defense. The road had been bombed for weeks by the Air Force, but Holder did not know that the road existed. Because the Iraqis always established their defensive positions close to the few roads in the desert, that was an important gap in the Army's intelligence.

"In the corps's terrain analysis and my own maps, it did not appear," recalled Holder. "Mapping was a problem."

Step by step, the regiment began to feel its way, moving eight troops abreast. The commander of Eagle Troop, Capt. H. R. McMaster, had his men in the standard formation. The scouts in the Bradley fighting vehicles were in the lead, looking for the enemy. The tanks and artillery followed behind.

As the regiment rolled forward, the sun broke through the clouds. But the wind was whipping the sand so hard it was difficult to conduct long-range observation, even with the thermal sights on the Bradleys and the M1 tanks. Soon, McMaster saw the telltale signs that the regiment had entered the Tawakalna security zone. A handful of Iraqi armored personnel carriers, presumably a reconnaissance force for a larger formation to the rear, was detected and attacked. But not knowing about the IPSA pipeline road, the regiment could not say where or when it would run into the main force.

McMaster alerted his men that they could be running into the Iraqis at any moment.

"We attack in five minutes to the Seventy Easting," he said, referring to the longitudinal line on the Army maps. "This is the moment we have all waited for."

"What kind of contact can we expect?" asked Lt. Gauthier, the third platoon leader.

"Enemy contact," McMaster replied, stating the obvious. It was clear to the soldiers that the intelligence had something to be desired.

Just on the other side of a small crest in the sand was the 18th Brigade of the Tawakalna Division. The Tawakalna was supposed to have been hit hard during the air war. But it had not been easy for the Air Force to isolate the Tawakalna from the jumble of Republican Guard units and tactical reserves near the Wadi al-Batin. The 18th Brigade had emerged from the air war with twelve of its eighteen tanks intact.

Trying to take advantage of even the smallest change in terrain, T-72 tanks were dug in quickly so they could get off the first shot at the coalition forces as they came over a rise. Behind the tanks were an ammunition depot, a field hospital, and a supply base.

As Eagle Troop's Bradleys approached the incline, they came under fire from Iraqi artillery and were peppered by small-arms fire from several seemingly abandoned buildings. McMaster ordered his tanks to fire. Nearly simultaneously, the tanks fired 120mm shells into the building, devastating the structure.

McMaster shifted the more vulnerable Bradleys to the rear and moved the tanks into the lead, taking the point position in a nine-tank wedge. As his tank crested the rise, his gunner yelled out, "Tanks direct front!"

Eight Iraqi tanks were dug into fighting positions behind large earthen berms. It was like jumping into a foxhole and finding it filled with enemy soldiers. Both sides seemed surprised by the sudden confrontation.

With the rest of the Eagle Troop wedge still on the other side of the rise, McMaster's tank used its laser range finder to fix the position of the Iraqi tanks.

"Fire, Sabot," the gunner yelled.

A Sabot round made of depleted uranium shot out of the barrel at one mile per second. As the barrel recoiled, the T-72 exploded in a shower of fire and sparks.

McMaster's tank turned its turret to take on another T-72. The stabilizers in the M1 enabled the gunner to train the main gun on an enemy tank even as he churned forward. McMaster's gunner let fly another Sabot round, knocking the turret off a second T-72. All told, McMaster's tank fired for six or seven seconds before the rest of the tanks drove across the ridge.

While Eagle Troop was rolling forward, its executive officer, 1st Lt. John Gifford, radioed McMaster. "Seventy Easting was the limit of advance," Gifford said, referring to the north-south grid line that was to mark the regiment's farthest point of penetration.

"We are still in heavy contact, advancing to the seventy-three," McMaster replied. "Tell them I'm sorry."

Having locked horns with the Iraqis, he had no time to wait for Rhame's 1st Mechanized Infantry Division to come up and finish the job. There was only one way to go now: forward.

Eagle Troop's tanks kept grinding along with the M1s blasting away.
with their 120mm guns. The troop’s Bradleys fired TOW antitank missiles and raked the backs of the American tanks with machine gun fire to keep Iraqi soldiers from trying to sneak up on the M1s and blasting their more vulnerable rear with rocket-propelled grenades. The most unusual kill came when a Bradley used a TOW missile to knock out a Soviet-made ZSU-234 antiaircraft gun that the Iraqis were using to sweep the battlefield.

Eagle Troop finally halted on a small hill from which the soldiers could look out several miles. McMaster called each platoon to see if they had made it through and was relieved to find out that the troop had not suffered any losses.

Not all of the regiment was so lucky. Ghost Troop and Iron Troop had also clashed with the Iraqis, and one of Ghost Troop’s Bradley gunners was killed when his 25mm gun jammed and he was hit by Iraqi fire as he got out of his Bradley to try to fix it. To the south, the regiment’s troops had easier going, tangling with elements of Iraq’s 12th Armored Division.

After the sun set, the regiment continued to pound the Iraqis from afar, firing artillery at truckloads of fleeing Iraqis. By 10PM the weather had cleared enough to allow the VII Corps’ aviation brigade to launch two Apache helicopter raids. The glow of the burning vehicles reflected off the clouds while secondary explosions from the artillery strikes sent towers of fire shooting up to the sky along the horizon. Finally, Rhame’s 1st Infantry Division arrived. Like a relay racer picking up the baton, it passed through the regiment’s position at 11:11PM and continued to press the attack.12

The regiment later dubbed its fight the Battle of 73 Easting. The battle with the Tawakalna Division had been unplanned and ran counter to the guidelines it had received from Franks not to get tangled up with the Iraqis. But it was one of VII Corps most important victories. If three troops from an American Cavalry regiment could destroy an Iraqi brigade at little cost, perhaps the Republican Guard was not the vaunted fighting force Franks had assumed it to be. But there was no time to absorb the larger military lessons of the battle. The regiment had its piece of glory and the rest of the VII Corps plowed ahead.

While Holder’s regiment was heading into the fray, Funk’s 3rd Armored Division was also moving toward the IPSA pipeline road to continue the attack against the shank of the Republican Guard positions.

As Funk attacked, Army intelligence officers picked up a heated argument over the radio between the commander of the Tawakalna Divi-

sion and other Iraqi commanders. When the lower-ranking commanders complained that the Tawakalna commander was talking on an uncoded radio broadcast, they were angrily rebuked. The Tawakalna commander was desperately trying to pull together a defense against the unexpected allied attack from the west in the fastest way he could. He had no time for security procedures and announced he was assuming control over the other divisions in the area.

Funk attacked two brigades abreast, drawing on firepower from the Special Operations AC-130 gunships, A-10 attack planes, and F-16s. But friendly fire led Funk to suspend the attack that night. Identification in the desert was difficult.

The decision was made after the division mistakenly raked one of its Bradley fighting vehicles with 25mm fire, killing a scout, and some of Funk’s soldiers lost contact with Holder’s brigade to the south. In the darkness, three of the division’s Bradleys were hit by friendly fire and two more soldiers were killed. Navigation in the desert was difficult.

Meanwhile, immediately north of Funk’s brigade, Griffith’s division, having taken Al Busayyah, was again moving eastward toward the hook of the Iraqi defenses. But the 1st Armored Division was having trouble keeping pace as it moved to fill out the three-division VII Corps “fist” for attacking the Republican Guard.

Griffith’s problem was not the Iraqis, but fuel. The Army’s turbine-powered M1 tanks that were pulverizing the Iraqi T-72s were gas-guzzlers and needed to be topped off every eight or nine hours.

Griffith also had more ground to cover than the other divisions, and like much of the VII Corps, he had planned on getting a breather before setting off after the Republican Guard. He figured that he would have about thirty-six hours to refuel and regroup. But with Schwarzkopf demanding that the corps press on, there would be no pause. Adding to Griffith’s problem, the thirst of his division had been increased by Franks’s decision to switch the 75th Artillery Brigade from Rhame’s 1st Infantry Division to Griffith’s division. Franks made the switch to increase Griffith’s firepower before his confrontation with the Republican Guard, but the brigade needed fuel to keep it going.

Quenching the VII Corps’s thirst for fuel was the task of Brig. Gen. Robert P. McFarlin, Funk’s chief logistics officer. McFarlin had worked day and night to come up with a system to keep the attack rolling, but he was not confident about how well it would work. McFarlin had advised Franks before the ground war that there was a high risk that VII Corps would literally run out of gas on the third day of the ground offensive despite the best efforts of the logisticians.
There was no shortage of fuel. Sitting in Saudi Arabia, the Army had plenty of that. The problem was trucks. The Army depended largely on 5,000-gallon trucks that worked well when its forces were moving along the autobahns of Europe, but the fuelers were not designed to travel off roads or through deep sand.

Under pressure from Les Aspin, the Wisconsin chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, the Army had purchased HEMTTs. The large eight-wheeled trucks, which were manufactured in Aspin’s home state, could carry 2,500 gallons and could maneuver in bad terrain. They had achieved a brief moment of notoriety when George Bush cited them as a blatant example of Democratic pork-barrel politics during his 1988 debate with Michael Dukakis. But by the time of the Gulf War, the Army’s only complaint was that they did not have enough of them. The VII Corps had received forty-seven HEMTTs just before the war, and McFarlin ordered that they be loaded with fuel as a reserve.

To ease the strain on resupplying VII Corps, McFarlin established a number of logistical bases along the route into Iraq as the VII Corps divisions advanced. That way, the trucks that refueled the VII Corps juggernaut would not have to make their way all the way back to Saudi Arabia to take up a new load of fuel and then head north again. One base was at Nelligen, a patch of sand some twelve miles into Iraq, which was named after a town in Germany. Another was Buckeye, established by a National Guard unit from Iowa.

With the VII Corps rolling forward, however, McFarlin could see that a serious fuel problem was developing. Trucks were going out with fuel and not coming back. There were reports of fuel tankers getting lost or stuck in sand.

The 1st Armored Division borrowed some fuel from Funk’s 3rd Armored Division and, with three brigades abreast, headed toward the Medina Division, which was rushing into new positions to defend its western flank. In the process, Griffith’s division collided with remnants of the Tawakalna Division, which was trying to make its way north, and a brigade from the Adnan Division, a Republican Guard infantry unit.

But the fuel provided by Funk’s division was just a stop-gap measure. Unless more fuel was made available to the 1st Armored Division, Griffith would be forced to leave a brigade behind and continue his attack with a reduced division.¹³

To get the trucks rolling again, McFarlin turned to Steve Walker, a twenty-eight-year-old tobacco-chewing captain from Memphis, Tennessee. Assigned to the VII Corps’s 16th Support Group, Walker had a lot of practical experience in Army logistics.

McFarlin told Walker he could take the HEMMTs if only he could find someone to drive them. Virtually all fuel truck drivers were driving somewhere in Iraq or with the logistics trains following the divisions. Walker had to assemble the emergency fuel convoy to keep the corps attack rolling.

Within five hours, Walker had formed a transportation company of eighty volunteer drivers—cooks, clerks, NCOs, chemical decontamination specialists, and the like. About three-quarters of them had never driven a HEMTT before, and only five of them had ever discharged fuel from the vehicle. Leaving at 5:30 PM, the convoy drove for eighteen straight hours over the dirt paths plowed by the combat engineers. After arriving, the drivers took out their technical manuals and began to pump the fuel as they read how to do it. At that time, Griffith’s 2nd brigade had only one hour of fuel left.¹⁴

THE BOBBY KNIGHT PRESS

While the VII Corps was trying to keep pace, Yeosock again alerted Franks to the bad reviews he was getting in Riyadh. Schwarzkopf was still unhappy with the pace of the attack, Yeosock told Franks on the morning of February 26. The CENTCOM commander thought the corps was moving too slow and wanted Franks to explain the reason.

Franks said he thought things were going fine and would call Schwarzkopf to square things with him.

That was not the only message Yeosock had for Franks. Yeosock was also worried about the logistics problem and suggested that the VII Corps open up a new and more direct supply route. The British were slashing through the Iraqi units to their east. If Smith’s 1st Armored Division turned south and cleared a path through the Iraqi fortifications from the rear, the Army could shorten the fuel runs by sending its trucks from Log Base Echo near Hafar al-Batin to the IPSA pipeline road that ran along the Wadi al-Batin.

Franks did not like the idea. The VII Corps had attacked west of the Wadi al-Batin precisely to avoid the Iraqi minefields and fortifications along the border there. He did not want to change the direction of the British attack by ordering them to attack the fortifications from the rear.

But after getting off the phone, Franks nonetheless gave a “warning order,” or alert, to Smith to plan an attack south. Franks intended it as a simple notice about a decision that was not yet made. But in the British staff system, warning orders were not taken casually. The British commander was not happy about the order, but he prepared to carry it out.
Smith took all his combat engineers, attached them to Chris Hammerbech’s 4th Brigade, and began to prepare for an attack south.

Once again, Yeosock had sent Franks a mixed message. He had relayed Schwarzkopf’s frustration, but then burdened the VII Corps commander with the problem of planning an attack to the south.

While Schwarzkopf was berating Yeosock he was also looking over his shoulder at Powell. Now that an Iraqi order to withdraw had been announced by Baghdad, it was beginning to influence the political equation. Powell raised the issue of a cease-fire in a telephone call. Schwarzkopf said he was planning to destroy the Republican Guard in the next two days. If the coalition called a cease-fire, CENTCOM would not accomplish its mission. Powell told Schwarzkopf to stick with the current plan.

Despite Powell’s response, Schwarzkopf was worried the war might be ended prematurely. That afternoon, at 1:30PM, Schwarzkopf spoke with Sir Patrick Hine, the senior British official who was based in London, who also mentioned the possibility of a cease-fire. The Russians were planning to call a Security Council meeting to push for an end to the fighting. Hine advised.

At 1:46PM, Schwarzkopf passed the word to Yeosock. Pressure was building for a cease-fire. At 2:25PM, Schwarzkopf talked again to Powell. The JCS chairman had to buy CENTCOM some time, Schwarzkopf implored. The wadis were filling up with rain and the going was rough. Powell said that Schwarzkopf would have to keep the VII Corps moving. Schwarzkopf replied that he might have to get rid of Franks to do so. Under tremendous pressure to get the job done, Schwarzkopf began to take things directly into his own hands.

Stan Cherrie was in the VII Corps “jump” Tactical Operations Center when a call came through from CENTCOM headquarters. The forward TOC was not the best way to run the war. The entire command center was nothing but two armored personnel carriers filled with communications gear. The main TOC had much better communications capabilities, but one of the APCs that was moving it forward had thrown a track and was stalled somewhere in Iraq.

Right away, Cherrie could tell he was talking to a high-level headquarters. The line was crystal clear, not scratchy like the tactical radio nets.

Col. B. B. Bell, Schwarzkopf’s executive assistant, was on the line. Schwarzkopf was calling for Franks. Cherrie explained that Franks was not there; he was off talking to Funk at the 3rd Armored Division command post. Suddenly, the phone at the other end of the line changed hands.

“Who is this?” a familiar voice yelled.
Cherrie identified himself and gave a quick rundown on the status of the VII Corps attack.
“I want to keep pushing. We got a full court press on. I want the Bobby Knight press. You know who Bobby Knight is? Keep moving!” Schwarzkopf yelled again.

After Franks returned, Cherrie told him that Schwarzkopf had called, barked at him, and then hung up.15

Franks called Riyadh and got Schwarzkopf on the line. He figured that things were going pretty well. Step by step he was moving his divisions into place to attack the Republican Guard. Franks said he was turning the corps 90 degrees to attack to the east. The 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was making short work of the Iraqis at 73 Easting. The 1st Armored Division had taken Al Busayyah. Two corps artillery brigades were being shifted from the breach sites to beef up Griffith’s division. The VII Corps was working the 3rd Armored Division into the fight. The British were attacking Iraq’s second echelon.

Then Franks mentioned that he was thinking about sending the British south, without saying that the idea had originated from Yeosock.

Schwarzkopf erupted. “Christ, don’t do that,” he exclaimed. The enemy was to the east, not the south, the CENTCOM commander shouted.

Franks had assumed that since the Republican Guard was not fleeing eastward toward Basra and the causeway over the marshes west of the city they planned to stay and fight. The VII Corps commander had reasoned that he had time to synchronize his attack against the Republican Guard.

But Franks was looking at only a small piece of the battlefield and missed the larger significance of the Iraqi tactics. From Riyadh, it was clear that the Guard was just trying to hold the line while the rest of the Iraqi army escaped. Ever since Baghdad has ordered a general withdrawal of its forces in Kuwait, it was only a matter of time before the protecting Republican Guard followed.

Schwarzkopf told Franks that intelligence showed that the Iraqis had sent transporters to pick up the Hammurabi Division tanks. The Medina had also been ordered to pull out. The VII Corps needed to press the attack. Schwarzkopf did not tell Franks that he was considering relieving him.

“Wilco,” said Franks. He would press the attack all night, including scheduling a deep attack with Apaches.

“You will have good shooting tonight,” Schwarzkopf yelled. “You may have fog tomorrow morning, so you must shoot now.”
It was the only time that Franks talked directly to Schwarzkopf during the ground war. Afterward, Franks called his staff together. It was time to crank up the heat.\textsuperscript{16}

That night, Franks sketched out his plan for the final battle with the Republican Guard. Drawing his plan in the sand, he proposed a double envelopment of the Iraqi forces. Griffith's 1st Armored Division, which had quenched its thirst for fuel thanks to Captain Walker's emergency caravan, would form part of the pincer in the north.

After two days of importuning by Yeosock and Arnold, Franks had finally been given operational control of John Tillielli's 1st Cavalry Division. It had taken fifteen hours longer for the VII Corps to get control of the 1st Cavalry than Army commanders had anticipated. Desperate to join the battle and relatively fresh, the 1st Cavalry was making a forced march north. Tillielli's division was to slip around the 1st Armored Division and continue to hit the tottering Republican Guard forces after they had been pummeled by the 1st Armored Division. Filling out the northern envelopment, Funk's 3rd Armored Division would continue to attack to the east.

The southern arm of the pincer, Franks initially decided, would be made up of Smith's British 1st Armored Division. Franks told the British that they should drive to the sea north of Kuwait City. Then, after reaching the coastal highway, the British should pivot north and roll to the Iraq-Kuwait border. After Franks learned that Rhame's 1st Infantry Division was making good progress, however, he decided to substitute the American division for the British 1st Armored.

It was not the first time that the British had to take a back seat to the Americans. The British attack against the Iraqi tactical reserves on the first two days of the ground war was described by one senior CENTCOM official after the war as "holding the door open for the U.S. Army" so it could pursue the Republican Guard. After the war, the British would tout their role in the war. Britain had insisted on joining the "main" Army attack for prestige and to hold down the casualties they expected if they joined the Marine attack into Kuwait. But Britain had become little more than a junior partner in a methodical Army assault and had given up a mission that would have afforded the British division a more central role and more glory — the liberation of Kuwait.

After nailing down the plan with his commanders, Franks thought he had the battle in hand. The VII Corps would scoop up much of the Iraqi Army that was south of Basra. This whole thing is going to work, Franks said he thought at the time.

But the sands of time had run out on VII Corps. The collapse of the Iraqi defense and the flight of the Iraqis north were changing the relative priority of the corps's attacks. For the first three days, the VII Corps had done most of the Army's fighting. The main impediment to the neighboring XVIII Corps had been weather, logistics, and the generous supply of cluster munitions the Air Force had liberally sprinkled throughout the desert.

Now Luck's XVIII Airborne was beginning to assume the main role. Peay's 101st Airborne Division was hopscotching its way to the east, and Barry McKeever's 24th Mechanized Division was also rolling east on Highway 8.\textsuperscript{17}

The "Mother of All Battles" had turned into a race to the Euphrates, and the Iraqis had a big head start. The question was whether CENTCOM could catch the Iraqis and whether it would have time to fight them if it did.
for battle. Unlike the VII Corps planners, McCaffrey was not in awe of the Iraqis. Dug into their fighting holes and with no air force to protect them, the Iraqi army was like a bunch of “tethered goats,” McCaffrey recalled after the war.

Schwarzkopf had a soft spot for the general, who commanded his old unit. Just before McCaffrey’s division moved to its attack positions in the Saudi desert, Schwarzkopf flew up to give a pep talk to one of the division’s reconnaissance teams. Before returning to his helicopter, Schwarzkopf grabbed McCaffrey by his uniform. With tears welling in his eyes, the commander told McCaffrey that once the ground war started there would be no stopping until the Army had destroyed the Republican Guard. President Bush had assured Schwarzkopf of that. That moment was chiseled in McCaffrey’s memory.

When it came time to launch the ground war, McCaffrey issued a top secret attack order that seemed like a call to a holy war and alluded to the assurance he had received from Schwarzkopf. “Soldiers of the Victory Division — we now begin a great battle to destroy an aggressor army and free two million Kuwaiti people,” the order read. “We will fight under the American flag and with the authority of the United Nations. By force of arms we will make the Iraqi war machine surrender the country they hold prisoner. There will be no turning back when we attack into battle.”

For three days of battle, Franks had methodically maneuvered his corps into position, hoping to carry out his double envelopment. Worried about dispersing his force, he had tugged on the reins of the VII Corps, trying to make sure that one of his lead charges did not out-gallop the others. But McCaffrey had operated under no such constraints.

McCaffrey’s thrust into Iraq had resembled one of Jeb Stuart’s wild rides during the Civil War. McCaffrey’s division — a potent force of 26,000 soldiers and 8,600 vehicles — had driven through a blinding sand and rain storm, over rough, corrugated terrain, to race north to the Euphrates. The toughest part of the drive came when McCaffrey squeezed his division through a narrow series of wadis that ran toward the Euphrates — an area McCaffrey nicknamed “the great dismal bog.” Operating under the protective umbrella of allied warplanes, and with the desert largely devoid of enemy, the division’s trucks had driven through the night with their headlights on and the warning lights on their tails blinking in the darkness.

Fuel had been his main worry. McCaffrey had brought hundreds of fuel trucks with him to help keep his grueling pace of fifteen miles per hour. Schwarzkopf wrote after the war that he had held up McCaffrey’s

ON THE MORNING of February 27, Barry McCaffrey flew to Jalibah airfield to meet with his commanders. Located thirty miles south of Highway 8, the east-west road that ran to Basra, Jalibah had been one of Iraq’s main airfields during the war. But now it was pockmarked with the burned and twisted wreckage of Iraqi MiG-29s and other fighters that McCaffrey’s 24th Division had blasted in a four-hour fight to seize the airfield.

After leaving his helicopter, the general made his way over to Col. Paul Kern, the commander of the division’s 2nd brigade. Kern had deployed his command post — two M-577 armored personnel carriers full of communications equipment — within a protective cordon of M1 tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles, which guarded the perimeter of the airfield.

No general was more aggressive than McCaffrey. He had been badly wounded in Vietnam, but it had not shaken his confidence or his ardor
advance so that he would not arrive at the Euphrates well ahead of Franks. But that was not how McCaffrey remembered it: he had stopped only long enough to replenish his division and move on.

To his rear, the logisticians also pulled out all the stops so that the 24th Mech and its sister units in the XVIII Airborne Corps — Binford Peay’s 101st Airborne Division, Doug Starr’s 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and James Johnson’s 82nd Airborne, which had earned the sobriquet “82nd truckborne” because it was driving well behind the main thrust — would have enough fuel and supplies to finish the war. As the combat engineers plowed dirt roads from the huge supply base near Rafha to As Salman and beyond, an overzealous aide to Lt. Gen. William G. Pagonis, CENTCOM’s top logistician, sent sixty-three Saudi fuel trucks with third world drivers north into Iraq. That violated the coalition’s political injunction that the Arab members of the coalition and their vehicles were to be limited to the attack on Iraqi forces in Kuwait (the liberation of an Arab country) and were not to enter Iraqi territory (an attack on a fellow Arab country). When the third world drivers returned, the logisticians informed them that they had never been to Iraq.

As McCaffrey’s division hit Highway 8 on February 26, it encountered its first real opposition. After an artillery duel in which it used its radar targeting devices to locate Iraqi guns, the division overran a detachment of Iraqi special forces and straddled the route. With both the 101st and the 24th astride Highway 8, there was no hope of an Iraqi escape to the west. McCaffrey then sent one of his units — 197th Brigade — to seize Tallil airfield to the west, while the rest of the division rolled west toward Jalibah. Some of McCaffrey’s critics later complained that the assault on Tallil diverted forces from the main event — finding the Republican Guard. But McCaffrey insisted it did not slow the 24th’s attack.

The next day, Col. Paul Kern and Col. John LeMoyne, the commanders of the 24th Mech’s 1st Brigade, kicked off their attack on Jalibah at 6AM, pounding the air base with their artillery and sending in their armor. The Iraqis responded to the fusillade by firing antiaircraft artillery straight up into the air. The idea that an American armored division might have snuck up on them from the west was inconceivable to the Iraqi troops; they thought they were being bombed. By 10AM the base was in American hands.

But Jalibah was just a waypoint.

While the bulk of their force had been routed, the Iraqis were making one last desperate effort to delay the allies’ advance so they could use the two remaining escape routes: the Hawr al Hammar causeway, which crossed the marshes west of Basra, and the routes over the canal to the east and through Basra itself.

Hastily constructing a defensive line, the Iraqis took up positions that ran from the causeway to the Rumaila air base to the south, drawing on soldiers from two Republican Guard infantry divisions and two armored brigades from the Hammurabi Division. The Iraqis had depth to their position. Allied maneuver room was restricted by the latticework of pipes and pumping stations in the Rumaila oil field.

McCaffrey was in the best position to cut off the retreating Iraqis, which was just what he proposed to do. Meeting Kern at his M-577 command vehicle, McCaffrey outlined his plan to slam the door on what was left of the Iraqi army.

Together with Starr’s 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 24th would pound the Iraqis with artillery and then shoot forward across the Rumaila oil field toward Basra. By doing so, virtually all the Iraqi army remaining in the Kuwait theater of operations would be cut off. Whoever wanted to go north thereafter would have to get off their armored vehicles and walk.

The 24th Mech, McCaffrey told Kern, would continue on to the bridges crossing the Basra canal on the southern outskirts of Basra. Kern’s brigade was to take the airfield. Then almost as quickly as he had come, McCaffrey was on his way,

The general had not yet persuaded the cautious Luck, his XVIII Airborne commander, to let him march to Basra. McCaffrey had planned to tackle that task later in the day.¹

While McCaffrey was positioning his division for its final battle, Maj. Gen. Binnie Peay of the 101st Air Assault Division also had a plan to help shut the gate on the Iraqi army.

An ardent proselytizer for the Army’s helicopter assault capabilities, Peay argued that the military experts who thought only in terms of heavy armored divisions with their concentration of tanks too often failed to appreciate the mobility and destructive power of the helicopter-laden divisions.

Like McCaffrey, Peay knew that the real action was to the east — which was where he was headed. After being the first to cut off the Iraqis’ escape route in the west along Highway 8, Peay took control of the 12th Aviation Brigade, the XVIII Airborne Corps’s reserve of Apache helicopters, and moved some of his helicopters west of Jalibah to a piece of desert that the Iraqi air force had used as a bombing range in earlier days.

While McCaffrey pushed east toward Basra, Peay planned to airlift
an entire brigade across the Euphrates by Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters and plunk it down north of the critical city. Three infantry battalions with antitank missiles and 105mm artillery pieces—three thousand men in all—would be astride the route north of Basra protected by Apache helicopters and Air Force warplanes.

It would be the most forward-deployed combat brigade in Iraq and the only one on the north side of the Euphrates. American forces would be bracketing Basra. Whoever slipped through McCaffrey’s grasp would be blocked by the 101st. Between the two of them they would close the back door on the Iraqis.2

After a shaky start, the Army was beginning to build up some real momentum. The 24th Mech and 101st were ready to deliver a roundhouse punch on both sides of the Euphrates. To the south, the VII Corps was getting ready to catch any Iraqis that were still south of the XVIII Corps in a pincer.

For four days, Schwarzkopf had been complaining that his field commanders were not aggressive enough. Now he had two of his most hard-charging generals within striking distance of Basra. CENTCOM would not be able to stop all the Iraqis from getting away. It could get many of them, however, if the commanders in Riyadh and in Washington gave them the time to deliver the coup de grâce.

A CALL FROM HOME

At the Pentagon, the focus was not on the American divisions that were closing in on Basra. It centered on the pummeling the Iraqis had taken on Muttah Ridge when they fled Kuwait City on the evening of February 25.

Throughout the war, Powell had been the voice of caution and restraint. All along, his reservations about the war had been political as well as military. During the buildup he had advised Sir Patrick Hine that a war with Iraq could spark a backlash against the West throughout the Middle East. No backlash ever materialized. Still, by February 27, Powell was again concerned. Once the Iraqis were out of their holes and on the move, they were easy prey for the Air Force, Navy, and Marine attack planes. During Khasj, allied warplanes had pounded the Iraqis with much the same results, but the press had not been in Kuwait to record the scenes of destruction. But now news reports were beginning to refer to a “turkey shoot” of the retreating Iraqi forces. It was as though the victimizer had suddenly become the victim. The effectiveness of the air strikes was threatening to bring an end to the land war before the ground forces had fully come into play.

At 3:05PM on February 27, Powell called Schwarzkopf. Powell had broached the subject of a cease-fire before. Now he began to prod Schwarzkopf to begin seriously thinking about wrapping up the war. Powell told Schwarzkopf that CENTCOM was entering a “window” in which to end the war. Schwarzkopf agreed.

“What are your plans for tomorrow?” Powell asked.

Schwarzkopf had talked to Yeosock earlier that afternoon and Yeosock had said that the Army needed one more day. Schwarzkopf jubilantly reported that the Iraqis had been pushed into a box near Basra. By the evening of February 28, CENTCOM would have destroyed the Republican Guard.

“Do you realize if we go until tomorrow night that will be five days? The five-day war. Does that have a good ring to it?” Schwarzkopf asked. Powell was noncommittal.

Schwarzkopf also broached the idea of a five-day war with his staff. That would beat Israel’s 1967 war with the Arabs by one day. The Arab-Israeli war had not been preceded by five weeks of bombing, but nobody dared to make that point to the CENTCOM commander. By the afternoon of February 27, Schwarzkopf saw an advantage in ending the war quickly. Schwarzkopf wanted to hold down casualties, but he also wanted to win bragging rights for himself and the U.S. Army.3

That afternoon, Schwarzkopf’s spokesman, Navy Capt. Ronald Wildermuth, contacted Pete Williams, Dick Cheney’s chief spokesman. Wildermuth said that CENTCOM knew there had to be an end-of-the-war briefing, and Schwarzkopf wanted to be the one to give it. Schwarzkopf had not liked the idea that Powell’s deputies were regularly briefing the news media in Washington. Detailing the progress of the war, Schwarzkopf felt, was CENTCOM’s prerogative, and he was determined to deliver the finale.

Williams conveyed Schwarzkopf’s request to Cheney and Powell, and they approved the idea. Schwarzkopf made plans to give his windup briefing that night.4

Meanwhile, Col. B. B. Bell, Schwarzkopf’s executive assistant, telephoned Glosson and said that the Air Force should count on the 27th being the last night of the air war. No final decision had been made yet, but the handwriting was on the wall. If Schwarzkopf was to have his five-day war, it could end before the evening of the 28th.

While the commanders in Washington and Riyadh were talking about when to end the war, McCaffrey had halted his advance to refuel and regroup just out of range of the Iraqi artillery protecting the approaches
to Basra. The laptop computer that the division used to map the battle-
field told the story. Rather the worse for wear after bumping along the
western desert for more than 200 miles, the computer screen was nearly
obscured by a milky film. By pressing down on the screen, McCaffrey's
aides could just make out the characters being transmitted to them by
the division's intelligence officers back in Saudi Arabia. They were
sending the coordinates of the fleeing Iraqi units, derived from a
JSTARS surveillance plane.

With the JSTARS data and other intelligence on the Hammadabi
Division in hand, McCaffrey was lobbying hard to pour it on. In their own
way, Luck and his top aides were every bit as cautious as Franks. After
the war, McCaffrey observed that Luck's caution went back to Vietnam.
As a young commander, Luck had seen most of his unit chewed up in a
fierce battle with the North Vietnamese army. Luck did not like to take
unnecessary chances — or casualties — and he was nervous about McCa-
ffrey's plan to attack to the outskirts of Basra.

When McCaffrey had discussed the issue before the land war, Luck
and his G-3, or chief operations officer, Col. Frank H. Akers, had fret-
ted that the Iraqis would use chemical weapons when their backs were
against the wall. They also argued that it would be hard for the 24th
Division to navigate amid all the oil pipelines in the Rumaila oil field.

Akers was even worried that the Iraqis might torch the Rumaila oil
field, turning it into a huge fireball that would consume McCaffrey's
division, McCaffrey recalled. McCaffrey had already consulted
ARAMCO oil engineers, who assured him that the idea of turning the
oil field into a raging inferno was preposterous.

One by one, McCaffrey had tried to dispose of the arguments ad-
vanced by his command and his staff. Since the Iraqis were not using
helicopters and their artillery was notoriously inaccurate, McCaffrey ar-
gued that the chemical weapons would not be a major threat to the
Americans. To reassure his superiors about the Rumaila oil field, Mc-
caffrey said he would fire artillery into it before he advanced. If it was
possible to ignite the oil field, McCaffrey would make sure it was the
Iraqis who were incinerated, not the 24th Mech.

After a long conversation with Luck over the tactical radio, Mc-
caffrey finally persuaded the commander to let him attack east. Luck
also gave him operational control over Starr's 3rd Armored Cavalry
Regiment to help him do it. Luck had agreed that the 24th Mech and
the 3rd Cavalry should begin their drive to the outskirts of Basra, start-
ing at 5AM the next day.9

Peay was also pushing the war as hard as he could. By the afternoon
of February 27, Peay had four attack helicopter battalions flying north
of the Euphrates River blasting the retreating Iraqi columns.

As he waited for the final approval for his plan to put a brigade north
of Basra, the 101st commander flew toward his eastward base of opera-
tions near the Talil airfield just before darkness. When the command
helicopter landed, the pilot unknowingly set it down in a field of unex-
ploded Air Force cluster bombs but luckily none exploded. Peay huddled
up in the helicopter and tried to catch a few hours' sleep before
orchestrating the end game in the morning.

But while McCaffrey had won approval for his attack, Peay's plan was
too daring for his superiors. After the war, Akers said that the XVIII
Airborne command had no intention of letting Peay carry out his plan,
and Steve Arnold said he had never been told that the 101st wanted to
put ground forces north of Basra. Schwarzkopf also said he had not
been made aware of the plan and would have never allowed Peay to
carry it out had he known.8

As the XVIII Airborne Corps maneuvered to his north, Franks finally
had the divisions he wanted in order to take the war to the Republican
Guard — or those of them that still remained in the VII Corps's zone of
operation. Refueled and rearmed, Ron Griffith's 1st Armored Division
was heading east with Tilelli's 1st Cavalry to join in the attack. Just to
the south, Funk's 3rd Armored Division was pressing ahead. Rhame's
1st Infantry was also making good time. Franks's pincer movement was
unfolding.

The afternoon of February 27 saw some of the VII Corps's most
intense fighting. Hoping to delay the allied advance, an armored brigade
of the Medina Republican Guard Division set up a six-mile-long skirmish
line on the far side of a low hill. The Iraqis hastily dug fighting
holes for their T-72 and T-55 tanks and surrounded them with sand
berms. The Iraqi tank crews were ready to strike the American forces as
they came rolling over the ridge.

The tactic worked better in theory than it did in reality. As the M1
tanks of Col. Montgomery Meigs's 2nd Brigade of the 1st Armored
Division crested the ridge, they halted their advance. The Americans
had a high-technology advantage and were determined to exploit it. Un-
like the M1 targeting system, which created images from heat given off
by the Iraqi tanks, the T-72's targeting system depended on available
light and was less effective at long range, assuming the Iraqi guns could
even reach their targets. Meigs was determined to do whatever shooting
was necessary at long distance.
Lodged on the crest of the hill, the Americans attacked the dug-in Iraqi tanks from 2,500 yards. Instead of blocking the Americans, the Iraqis had succeeded only in transforming their armor into vulnerable pillboxes. The sand had been so hastily pushed against the sides of the tanks that it left the turrets and some of the top decks unprotected. The M1s pumped one Sabot round after another into the Iraqis, knocking the turrets off the tanks and sending the rounds through the makeshift sand walls, turning the Iraqi tanks into fireballs.

Unable to spot the Americans with their targeting system in the overcast weather, the Iraqis in desperation aimed their guns at the muzzle flashes of the American tanks. But the American tanks were out of range, and the Iraqi rounds fell short. Even if the Iraqis had been able to score a direct hit, they were not likely to have destroyed their enemy. American intelligence reported before the war that the T-72 tank rounds could not penetrate the frontal armor of the M1 tank.

Even by the grim standards of the Persian Gulf War, it was an impressive tableau of destruction. The battle was the biggest armor engagement of the war. In forty-five minutes, American tanks and aircraft had destroyed sixty T-72 tanks, nine T-55 tanks, and thirty-eight Iraqi armored personnel carriers. It was more like a one-sided clay pigeon shoot than an armored battle.7

In the Black Hole, Buster Glosson and his deputies were also pressing the attack. With the onset of the ground war, Powell and Schwarzkopf had finally given the air-war planners the green light to resume hitting targets in Baghdad. Schwarzkopf figured that the strikes would make it that much more difficult for the Iraqis to coordinate the defense of Kuwait. But for Glosson, it was an opportunity to make one final push to undermine the Saddam Hussein regime, which was already under maximum stress. If ever there was a time that strategic bombing might cause the regime to collapse, he figured this was it.

Glosson pressed the attack on downtown Baghdad against the Iraqi leadership's suspected command posts, political structures, intelligence services, and praetorian guard. He targeted the Baath Party headquarters, a huge structure that had survived the cruise missile attack on the opening night of the war. He also hit the Presidential Guards at Abu Ghurayb, Baghdad's Special Security Service headquarters, the new Presidential Palace, and the Iraqi leader's residence in Tikrit.

The renewal of the attacks had a special significance for Col. Eberly, who had been held captive since the failed effort to rescue him. On February 23, the F-117s had hit the intelligence service headquarters where Eberly and other POWs were being kept. No one at CENTCOM had a clue that allied prisoners were there. Fortunately for the prisoners, the F-117s blew open the entranceway to the headquarters without killing the prisoners.

Eberly felt the building shake as the bombs crashed through the entrance to the headquarters, rocking the floor. Eberly was scared out of his wits when the F-117s blasted his prison. He had been beaten, starved, and abused since his capture more than five weeks earlier and felt he was barely hanging on. With the destruction of the headquarters, the POWs were transferred to another facility and put under the less harsh custody of the Iraqi army. After the war, Eberly concluded that the Americans that had nearly killed him might have saved his life.

Now that the Army was pressing its attack, CENTCOM received an intelligence report that the Iraqi president might be preparing two aircraft to fly his family, his closest advisers, and himself out of Iraq in the next forty-eight hours to Mauritania, Moscow, or some other refuge. To prevent this, Glosson ordered the F-117s to destroy the jets at the Muthena airfield. After the war, Bush administration officials considered whether to turn a blind eye if the Iraqi leader went into exile. But in the frantic final days of the war, the air-war commander was not just trying to topple the Iraqi leader, he was also trying to trap him.8

Drawing on new intelligence from defectors from the Iraqi weapons programs, who were beginning to make their way out of Iraq, the air-war planners also put At Tarmiyah and Al Altheer, two previously unknown nuclear facilities, on the target list.

At Khamis Mushait, the F-117 base near the Red Sea, some of the pilots were worried that Glosson was pressing his luck by sending them back to Baghdad. The weather was interfering with the attacks in the Iraqi capital, and with the war winding down, Glosson had directed them to fly lower — lower than they had flown during the entire war.

The F-117 pilots were not happy about the order or with the decision to hit the Baath Party headquarters, which had already been damaged in the war.

None of the F-117s had suffered a scratch during war, but now that the fighting was reaching its denouement, friction was taking hold and some odd things were beginning to happen.

An F-117 piloted by Maj. Lee Gustin had a close call when its bomb-bay door failed to shut after he dropped his bomb, making the plane detectable to Iraqi radars. The Iraqis launched an SA-3 missile at him, but after a few nervous seconds the bomb-bay door closed and the missile missed its mark.
On his first attempt to attack Baghdad at the lower altitude, Lt. Col. Ralph Getchell also had a close call. He was backlit by the moon, the dark silhouette of the plane clearly visible. The Iraqis fired a burst of 57mm fire that streamed by the tips of his plane. When an SA-3 was launched at his F-117, when Getchell maneuvered out of the spotlight, the shooting ceased but it was not a good omen.

Taking risks to hit a political target in the waning days of the war seemed to be a questionable proposition to the F-117 pilots. If the Iraqis managed to down a stealth fighter, thought Getchell, it would do a lot more for their propaganda than putting a few bombs in a party headquarters would do for the allies. Not everyone in the Air Force believed that bombing political targets could change governments, but they were not giving the orders. Two more waves of F-117 attacks were scheduled for the night of February 27 and early morning hours of the 28th.9

One of the Air Force's most secret weapons, however, was not intended for Baghdad. To penetrate the Iraqis' hardened command bunkers, the Air Force had launched a crash program to build a new bomb. Using howitzer gun tubes from the Watervliet Army Arsenal in upstate New York, the Air Force Systems Command had manufactured a huge, 4,700-pound laser-guided bomb, which it dubbed the GBU-28. By mid-February a test bomb had been dropped at Eglin Air Force Base, and the Air Force had watched in wonder as it drove itself deep into the ground like a stake. The goal had been to build thirty of the bombs, but only two were ready in the waning days of the war.

Tom Lennon's F-111Fs were to deliver them. To prepare for the delivery of the GBU-28, Lennon had picked out four of his best crews and given them two days' rest. With only a pair of bombs in Saudi Arabia, the mission was scaled back from four F-111Fs to two.

When the bombs were unloaded at Taif, they were still warm to the touch from the trinitol, the molten explosive that had been poured inside. The Air Force had sent only a single bomb-loading crew with the weapons, so the F-111s had to be loaded one at a time. To prevent the plane from listing with the weight of the GBU-28 on one wing, a 2,000-pound bomb was placed on the other wing.

There had been three possible targets: Taji One and Taji Two, command bunkers dug deep underground about fifteen miles northwest of Baghdad, and a command post underneath a palace in downtown Baghdad, in which, according to a defector from Saddam Hussein's security service, the Iraqi leader was spending most of his evenings following the bombing at the Al Firdos shelter.

Glosson, urged by Deptula, weighed the idea of striking the Baghdad compound with the GBU-28, but opted to go after the Taji bunkers. The idea of dropping a 4,700-pound bomb in the heart of Baghdad on its combat debut was too much even for Glosson. There was no reason to think that Saddam Hussein was at Taji, but it was a major Iraqi command post and undoubtedly housed some of Iraq's senior commanders.10

The strikes in and around Baghdad, however, were only part of the story. The air-war commanders had unleashed a torrent of air strikes when the Iraqi forces fled Kuwait City. But as the allied armies pressed their attack, allied warplanes were having a hard time stopping the Iraqi ground troops from fleeing from the battlefield and heading north of the Euphrates.

The attack order CENTCOM drafted in December directed the air commanders to destroy all the bridges and roads across the Euphrates. But Lt. Gen. Horner later recalled that the Iraqis proved to be more ingenious at repairing the bridges than the allies had anticipated. When the allies hit a bridge over the canal on the outskirts of Basra, the Iraqis pushed earth into the waterway and kept going. The causeway proved to be a particularly difficult target.11

Air strikes were also hampered by the civilian houses near Basra. The Iraqis were able to salvage some of their war machine by moving tanks and armored vehicles into residential areas west of Basra and driving the vehicles into the streets of the city, knowing that the allies would not go after armor in civilian areas. Bad weather and concerns about overflying Iranian territory also inhibited allied warplanes near Basra.12

Another major complication was confusion between the ground and air commanders. To prevent allied ground forces from being bombed by their own air forces by mistake, the military drew a dividing line on its maps, dubbed the Fire Support Coordination Line, or FSCL for short. Enemy forces in front of the line could be bombed with abandon. But no air strikes could take place inside the line without coordinating the strike with nearby allied ground units.

According to military doctrine, the location of the line was determined by the ground commander. As the Army advanced, it kept pushing the boundary in front of it farther out so that it could operate its helicopters and move its forces more freely.

“Our problem was not how much air we had,” recalled Col. Michael F. Reavey, who worked in Horner's operations center. “Our problem started to become how much airspace we had and wedging what we had into that piece of airspace.”

The issue came to a head on the morning of the February 27 when Luck moved the boundary north of the Euphrates so that Peavey's Anachon
helicopters could attack the causeway and the roads north of Basra. By
midafternoon, however, Horner was furious. Only a handful of Apache
attacks had been carried out, and moving the line had prevented the Air
Force from launching strikes against the Iraqi forces that were escaping
across the Euphrates. Iraqi forces had been traveling down a major road
north of the river that connected An Nasiriyah and Basra for eight hours
with virtual impunity. Horner decided that the line should be shifted
south to the Euphrates.

“The Army was moving the FSCL well out past where they were
going to impact on anything,” Reavey said. “When they did that, they
took away airspace and ground area for us to hit.”

A similar confusion arose the same day with the VII Corps. As the corps
moved forward, Franks and Cherie were worried that the divisions were
about to break through the Iraqi defenders and rush to the coast, where
the Air Force was attacking the Iraqis freely. To avoid a possible friendly
fire incident, Cherie directed Maj. David Rhodes, an Air Force officer
assigned to VII Corps, to inform the air-war commanders in Riyadh that
the boundary was to be shifted east of the coastal highway leading north
from Kuwait City. That meant that allied warplanes could not bomb Iraqi
troops as they streamed up the coastal road.

After directing that the line be shifted, the VII Corps staff discovered
that Franks’s attack had bogged down again. Rhodes called Horner’s
operations center and said it might be necessary to shift the line back to the
west so that the Air Force could resume its strikes. But Rhodes was
told that CENTCOM had decided to leave the boundary where it was.
No official reasons were given. But one of the center’s officers suggested
Rhodes that the politics of creating another “turkey shoot” in addition
to the “Highway of Death” were getting too hot to handle.

At 7PM CENTCOM clarified the boundaries. The FSCL would run
along the Kuwait coastline, up the Euphrates River, and then out to the
west.

After the war, it became clear that the positioning of the boundary was
one of the most important miscalculations in the final hours of the war.
Moving the line east and north was correct if the Army followed through
on the ground. But if the Army attack was delayed, the line should have
been moved back so that the allied warplanes could concentrate their
firepower on the fleeing forces. CENTCOM did neither. As a result,
much of the Iraqi army was shielded from the sort of punishing bombing
raids it endured during Khasji and its retreat from Kuwait City.

A doctrinal technicality and inertia took precedence over common
sense. The Army and the Air Force had trumpeted their ability to coordi-
nate the “air-land” battle. In the final fourteen chaotic hours of the
war, however, the FSCL had been pushed back and forth as the two
services sought maximum flexibility for their own forces. After the war,
Schwarzkopf said he knew little about the debate. It was another example
of how joint warfare fell short and how the services’ ability to work
together suffered from Schwarzkopf’s inattention.

THE MOTHER OF ALL BRIEFINGS

In Washington, Bush, Cheney, Scowcroft, Powell, and Baker were
huddled at the White House. President Bush was about to meet with
Douglas Hurd, the British foreign minister. Hurd thought the war might
take another couple of days. And in London, John Major’s national security
adviser, Sir Charles Powell, was dubious that it was time to end the
war. But it was the Americans who were carrying the fight to the
Iraqis now, and the government of John Major was prepared to defer to the
Americans. Margaret Thatcher had left office in November and the
departure of the hard-line prime minister from the political scene
loomed large in the calculation. Thatcher had reinforced Bush’s tougher
instincts in August, when Washington had to make the fateful decision
roll back the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as Cheney had suggested, or
draw the line at the invasion of Saudi Arabia, as Powell argued. And she
had argued to Prince Bandar that allied forces should occupy the
Rumaila oil field until their postwar demands were met. But the “iron
lady” was no longer part of the allied team.

The decision was, in effect, Bush’s to make.

Hurd’s White House visit began just after 1PM when he met with
Brent Scowcroft, Robert Gates, and other top officials. The meeting
was a prelude to the foreign minister’s session with Bush, and it provided
the two sides with an opportunity to discuss how the war was
going and talk about a possible cease-fire.

As the meeting began, Scowcroft suggested that the allies should take
the initiative and declare cease-fire terms instead of waiting for Iraq to
put forth its conditions for ending the war. As it had been throughout
the preparation and fighting of the war, Washington was in no mood to
bargain with Iraq.

Hurd agreed, but argued that any cease-fire that was arranged had to
guarantee that the allies got their POW’s back and needed to ensure that
the Iraqis did not fire any more Scud missiles.

The Americans agreed that securing the release of the allied prisoners
was a priority. “Especially down the hall,” Gates said, alluding to Bush.
It was not just an American and British concern, Scowcroft said. The Iraqis might also have thousands of Kuwaitis, perhaps 25,000 to 30,000.

The allied prisoners were not the only problem. The coalition had tens of thousands of Iraqi prisoners on their hands. Gates suggested that the allies might have to encourage some of the prisoners to return home. But Hurd said the allies needed to take account of the “cossack factor.” That was a reference to the forced repatriation of Russian prisoners—anti-communists, cossacks, and German collaborators—following World War II, an ignominious chapter in British history.

The larger issue, however, was the future of Iraq and its ability to regenerate its military capability. Scowcroft said that he thought Iraq’s capability to develop weapons of mass destruction had been largely destroyed. The United States knew that Iraq still had stocks of chemical weapons, but did not think they would use them now. Only later would American intelligence learn that many nuclear and some key biological weapons targets had not been hit.

Iraq was still a potential menace. With Thatcher out of power, however, the British had little appetite for an extended military operation to influence developments in Baghdad.

Hurd said that sanctions were of limited value in influencing Iraq before the war, but now that Iraq had been weakened by air and ground attacks, the situation was different. Using sanctions as the allies’ leverage was better than sitting in Basra, the British foreign minister asserted.

The British diplomat also raised the subject of a possible UN force to police the Kuwaiti border. Scowcroft thought that Arab troops—Egyptian, Saudi, and Syrian forces—might stay in Kuwait for a while, maybe joined by American and British troops. But he made clear that Washington was not interested in a long-term ground presence. Bush, the national security adviser said, was adamant that ground troops had to be returned.

Then the discussion moved to the Oval Office. Bush was on the verge of deciding the American position on the cease-fire and the British would be part of the deliberation.

Bush said he was very pleased with the way the war had gone. The allied forces, Bush confidently stated, were destroying the remnants of the Republican Guard. The war might go on another day, but at some point, Washington might be accused of butchering the Iraqis, Bush warned, according to notes taken by a participant.

As the officials pondered when to end the war, James Baker said that new information had just come in from the United Nations. The Iraqis had agreed to the demands issued by the United Nations Security Council resolution before the war.

At that point, Bush said it was time for Cheney and Powell to join the meeting.

Bush framed the decision. What do you need? he asked. The president would allow the top generals in the Pentagon and in the Gulf to determine when to end the war. From start to finish, it would be the generals’ war to win or lose.

Cheney, reflecting Powell’s assessment, said that the allies had all but completed their objective. “We are basically there,” the defense secretary said. “It could be over by now or maybe by tomorrow.”

Powell then explained that American forces were still in contact with the Hammurabi Division, but that should be finished soon, perhaps in a matter of hours.

Bush said it was important to pinpoint when the war might be brought to a close.

“We’ll talk to Norm,” Cheney said.

Powell broke in. Before the ground war began, Powell had told the press that a land offensive would not be like the air campaign. The battlefield would be a swirl of dust and confusion. And the debate between the intelligence agencies over battle damage assessment had borne Powell out. Even when the Iraqi forces were stationary, it was hard to determine just how much damage they had suffered. With the Iraqi army on the run and with bad weather, it was virtually impossible to specify exactly what was happening.

But Powell was relying on his intimations as a soldier, Schwarzkopf’s reports from Riyadh, and, most important, his political instincts. The press reports about the “Turkey Shoot” on the “Highway of Death” were an important consideration, he recalled after the war.

“I did talk to him,” Powell said, referring to Schwarzkopf. “He said we are at most twenty-four hours away. There are three thousand destroyed tanks. We are in the home stretch. Today or tomorrow by close of business.”

Powell said that most of the Iraqi forces had been pushed near Basra. “There is just one battle left. Norm and I would like to finish tomorrow, a five-day war.”

Bush asked Hurd what the British assessment was, and he said that the British commanders thought it would be possible to end the fighting in another day or two.

It was a political as well as a military call now, Powell reminded the group.
Bush was weighing the political factors. “We do not want to lose anything now with charges of brutalization, but we are also very concerned with the issue of prisoners,” he said. “The issue is how to find a clean end. This is not going to be like the battleship Missouri,” where the Japanese signed their surrender.16

Baker reinforced the argument for stopping the fighting. “We have done the job. We can stop. We have achieved our aims. We have gotten them out of Kuwait.” But the secretary of state acknowledged that there was “unfinished business” about the future of Saddam Hussein’s government and the embargo.

Powell suggested that the allies use the threat of air strikes to ensure that the Iraqis complied with the cease-fire, and Bush agreed.

Then Bush added: “Why do I not feel elated? But we need to have an end. People want that. They are going to want to know we won and the kids can come home. We do not want to screw this up with a sloppy, muddled ending.”

Bush suggested a speech, winding up the war, which Scowcroft was to write.

After some discussion, Bush and his aides agreed to end the war at 100 hours, the timing being more a matter of public relations than anything else.16

“In the final hours, we were told that the ring had not yet been completely closed but that, of all the Iraqi divisions inside the ring, only a tiny fraction still maintained unit cohesion and could be considered ‘fighting forces.’ My recollection is that the number amounted to two or three divisions. I do not recall whether any of the divisions still thought to be cohesive were Republican Guard divisions,” Bush observed after the war. “We were concerned principally about two aspects of the situation. If we continued the fighting another day, until the ring was completely closed, would we be accused of a slaughter of Iraqis who were simply trying to escape, not fight? In addition, the coalition was agreed on driving the Iraqis from Kuwait, not on carrying the conflict into Iraq or on destroying Iraqi forces.”17

At 9:00PM, Schwarzkopf bounded into the briefing room at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Riyadh to deliver his report to the nation. He started off by saying that Cheney had asked him to give an overview of the plan, even though he was the one who had initiated the idea. Then he took command, running through the plan as Lt. Col. Purvis, the chief Jedi, flipped the charts.

In devising their strategy, the CENTCOM commander claimed, the allies had faced a daunting military problem. Outnumbered three to two by troops in heavily fortified positions, CENTCOM had to come up with some kind of way to make up the difference. To weaken the Iraqis before the ground assault, the allies had pounded them from the air while the Marines tied down Iraqi divisions along the coast by practicing their amphibious operations.

CENTCOM had further confounded the Iraqis by launching the Marine attack first and focusing the Iraqis’ attention to the south before ordering the XVIII Corps and the VII Corps into the fray, the general explained.

The roundhouse punch from the west had moved the Screaming Eagles from the 101st Airborne Division to Highway 8, a mere 150 miles from the Iraqi capital. The allies could have gone to Baghdad, but that, Schwarzkopf explained, was never the allies’ purpose. Describing the ongoing attacks, Schwarzkopf described a solid wall of Army forces attacking the Iraqis in a “classic tank battle.” Of Iraq’s 4,000 tanks, 3,700 had been destroyed, he said.

“We almost completely destroyed the offensive capability of the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait theater of operations,” the general exclaimed. “The gates are closed.”

“When I say the gate is closed, I don’t want to give you the impression that absolutely nothing is escaping,” he continued. “Quite the contrary. That doesn’t mean that civilian vehicles are not escaping, that innocent civilians aren’t escaping, or unarmed Iraqis. That’s not what I’m talking about. I’m talking about the gate being closed on their military machine.”18

The briefing had been an effective advertisement for CENTCOM’s plan. But much of the information in the brief had been misleading. With the desertions and the bombing attacks, the ranks of the Iraqi army had been reduced by half before the land offensive took place, which meant that it was the Americans, not the Iraqis, who had the numerical advantage.

Far from fixing the Iraqis in place, the Marine attack had routed them out of the Kuwait theater, undermining the Army attack plan, which Schwarzkopf himself believed had been too slow. The Navy and Marine operations in the Persian Gulf had led the Iraqis to anticipate an amphibious landing, but the amphibious feint said as much about the allies’ limitations as it did about their ingenuity. With their poor mine-clearing ability and the failure to destroy Iraq’s Silkworm missiles, an amphibious landing was out of the question.

Although some of the Iraqis had stayed and fought, there had not been any classic tank battles. The largest armored confrontation — the 1st
Armored Division’s battle at Medina Ridge — saw M1 tanks pummeling the immobile tanks of the Iraqi covering force from a distance. More important, the gate was not shut. Iraqi units were still streaming north through Basra and over the causeway across the Euphrates.

Glosson and his Black Hole planners were furious. Schwarzkopf’s briefing, Glosson exclaimed, “was one of the most dishonest presentations” he had ever heard. The allies had been bombing the Iraqis for six weeks. The air-war planners had not won the war single-handedly, but Schwarzkopf was trying to make the ground war look more difficult than it was. “It was pure and simple an unethical briefing,” Glosson told his Black Hole planners.

In Washington, Paul Wolfowitz was dismayed by Schwarzkopf’s declaration that the allies had no intention of going to Baghdad. That was true, but why should Schwarzkopf tell that to the Iraqis? The civilians were still hoping for a coup and wanted to keep the psychological pressure on.

More important, Schwarzkopf had fortified Powell’s position that the war needed to be brought to a close by portraying it as a one-sided rout. Schwarzkopf was planning a five-day war, but he all but declared victory a day early. The press was beginning to ask what was to be gained by continuing the fighting.

At 10:30PM Powell called Schwarzkopf in his sleeping quarters, and this time the JCS chairman was more direct. Powell told Schwarzkopf that the White House was considering imposing a cease-fire as early as 5AM in the Gulf. Things were getting difficult back in Washington, Powell said, referring to the press reports about the “Highway of Death” on Mutlah Ridge. The JCS chief was moving to bring the war to a close.

The plan was to have President Bush ask the Iraqis to abandon their vehicles and walk north. That would prevent Iraq from salvaging its military equipment, and no one could accuse the Americans of shooting an Arab army in the back. But with the Iraqis on the move, it was unclear how the allies would get the word out.

Schwarzkopf told Powell that he could accept the decision, but cautioned him to be sure to put words in the president’s statement to the effect that CENTCOM would continue to destroy the Iraqis if allied forces were attacked.

“You can go with that unless I get back to you quickly,” Schwarzkopf said. “They are running and we are chasing.”

Powell said that Washington was thinking about arranging a meeting of military commanders on both sides to sort out the cease-fire arrangements, but Schwarzkopf dismissed the possibility.

“I can’t see their military leaders coming to meet us under any circumstances, and I do not want to go to downtown Basra,” Schwarzkopf observed. Then Schwarzkopf turned to the more immediate problem. If Washington was looking at establishing a cease-fire at 5AM Gulf time, Schwarzkopf told Powell, CENTCOM had only six hours and twenty minutes to bring the fighting to a halt.

Schwarzkopf called Yeosock, Horner, and Boomer and asked if they had any problem with a cease-fire at 5AM. For everyone but Yeosock, the war was already virtually over.

It was clear to Army commanders at Lucky Main that the XVIII Airborne and the VII Corps had not wrapped up the war. A strong-willed and confident commander would have challenged Schwarzkopf on this point at the risk of being put down. But Yeosock had been worn down by months of tirades and was not looking for any more trouble. The consequences of letting Yeosock reclaim his post from the more assertive Waller were looming larger and larger. The war was coming to an end before the job was completed, but nobody with enough rank to change that decision objected.

Yeosock began to alert the corps commanders that Washington was preparing to call a cease-fire, but he was not asking for their opinion on the wisdom of ending the fight. He only wanted their sense of when it could be feasible for them to disentangle themselves from the Iraqis so that the offensive could be halted.

For the XVIII Airborne Corps, the possibility of a cease-fire came at just about the worst possible time. The corps’s two most aggressive commanders were preparing to shoot forward the following morning.

McCaffrey was stunned. It never occurred to him that CENTCOM would cut off the war before the Army had finished the job. The XVIII Airborne Corps had spent hours getting into position for the final battle but would not be able to follow through. The call from Yeosock also torpedoed Peay’s plans.

At the VII Corps, Franks was also thrown off balance. After four days of taking abuse from the rear, he had synchronized his attack for the final battle, hoping to destroy whatever Iraqi forces were still south of McCaffrey’s position.

Even with all the criticism from Riyadh, Franks had continued to approach his task cautiously and methodically. He was determined to succeed while minimizing losses from the enemy or from incidents of friendly fire, which had become a bigger worry than the Iraqis. And as the VII Corps grappled with the confusion on the battlefield, he slowed
both prongs of his attack and stopped the air-war commanders from pouding the Iraqis in the path of his divisions as well.

When Griffith’s 1st Armored Division was caught up in a series of small engagements just beyond Medina Ridge, Franks had held off on bringing the 1st Cavalry Division into the fight, figuring it would be best to undertake the maneuver in daylight. As on the first day of the ground war, Franks was still wary of carrying out complicated divisional maneuvers at night.

Fear of friendly fire had also led Franks to halt the southern prong of his attack. Worried that the tip of Funk’s 3rd Armored Division might collide with Rame’s force as it moved north, Franks ordered Rame to halt at 7PM. Little was moving on the VII Corps front as widely separated commanders wondered what was to become of their classic double envelopment. Rame was still in a holding pattern when Yeosock called with the first word of a possible cease-fire.

Franks still hoped to entrapp the Iraqis in his zone, but to the end he had moved deliberately according to his own timetable. The Iraqis and Washington, however, were operating on a quicker schedule.

Yeosock told the VII Corps to begin winding down and advised the corps to halt its deep Apache attacks. Protecting the force was now the paramount consideration. Franks continued with his preparations for an advance but put the word out: there was to be no attack after 5AM.

As the Army offensive stalled, Maj. Gen. Burt Moore, Schwarzkopf’s chief operations deputy, called the Black Hole. There was to be no bombing after 5AM. That would force Glosson to cancel the last wave of F-117 attacks. The air-war commanders would have to squeeze in as many attacks as they could before that hour.

The first wave of F-117 attacks was assigned to attack Muthena airfield, Iraq’s chemical plant at Salman Pak, and to make a final run at the Baath Party headquarters. Glosson had ordered the F-117s to fly low to attack the Baath Party headquarters, but since those attacks had been inhibited by bad weather he was now ordering them to fly even lower. Fortunately for the F-117s, the pilots got a break in the weather. Seven F-117s each dropped two bombs on the Baath Party headquarters, but failed to cause major damage to the vast structure. The second and final wave of F-117s attacked the Al Musayib missile factory.

North of Baghdad, the F-111Fs proceeded with their attack on the Taji command post. 21

Each of the two command bunkers at Taji was about the size of a football field and was buried deep underground. To drop the GBU-28 bombs, the F-111Fs would have to turn on their afterburners. With the streams of fire shooting out of the afterburners, the planes would be lit up like Roman candles and easily identifiable to the Iraqis.

The plan was for Lt. Col. Ken Combs and Maj. Jerry Huss to drop their bomb on Taji Two, as Lt. Col. Dave White and Capt. Tom Himes followed behind. Each plane was to guide its bomb down with its own laser. The trailing plane would be in position to shiny its laser on the bunker if the lead plane failed to find its target. Then the two planes would reverse the order and circle around to attack Taji One.

As Combs approached Taji Two, Huss was having trouble picking out the command post on the targeting system. Both bunker complexes were linked by roads and had large doors, but they blended in with the rest of the terrain. Huss misidentified the target and dropped the first of the bombs on an open field.

Now, White and Himes would have to go after Taji Two with the remaining deep-penetration bomb. With their afterburners blazing, they flew toward the target. But Himes could not find it. The scope on the Pave Tac system was a maze of green lines. They would have to go around in a racetrack pattern and try again.

“Come on, Tommy. You’ve got to find the target,” said White. He did not like the idea of flying over the northern suburbs of Baghdad with his plane glowing in the sky.

As they swung around, Himes finally picked out Taji Two. There was no visible damage from the attacks the F-117s had carried out earlier in the war using 2,000-pound bombs.

Dropping the GBU-28 was tricky. There was no computer software to deliver the weapon; it had to be done manually. Himes punched in the projected time of fall and then pressed the release button as the plane neared the target. The bomb fell. White and Himes waited. Fifteen seconds. Twenty seconds. Forty seconds. Fifty seconds. White stopped counting.

“Shack,” White called out, meaning that the bomb had hit its DIMPI (designated mean point of impact). Seven seconds later a little puff of white smoke came out one of the doors. It had taken that long for the blast to come to the surface. The bomb had gone down a long way. 22

Meanwhile, the F-111Fs at Taif received an emergency assignment. As a member of a quick-reaction F-111F team, Capt. Mike Russell was used to getting difficult missions. But this one was straightforward: go as fast as you can to the Iraqi causeway over the Euphrates and take it out. For all the bombing, the allies had not knocked out all the escape routes over the Euphrates.
The F-111Fs had put together aircrews that specialized in knocking out bridge spans with laser-guided bombs. But no sooner would the bridges go down than the Iraqis would erect pontoon bridges and they had also been rebuilding the causeway west of Basra with dirt. Now that the Iraqis were streaming north, CENTCOM determined that it was more important than ever to knock out the remaining bridges and the causeway west of Basra and keep them down. The ground forces had not blocked the routes north. Shutting the door would be left to the aviators.

Since the early days of the war, the F-111Fs had been operating at medium altitude. But Col. Tom Lennon, the wing commander, told the airmen the last night of the war that they could fly at low-level if they thought that was the best way to carry out the mission of cutting the escape routes.

Dodging thunderstorms, Russell’s flight of F-111Fs zoomed to take out the causeway, dropping below 4,000 feet to approach their target. The 48th Tactical Fighter Wing did not have any photographs of the causeway, and they were searching for it in bad weather. Because of the poor visibility, the planes would have to fly directly over the causeway, drop the bombs ballistically, and then turn on their laser target designators and hope that they could guide them in the final seconds before they struck. The F-111Fs had attained good results with their laser-guided bombs, but this was not the scientific way to go about bombing.

When Russell and his wingman spotted the huge earthen and stone bulwark, it was clear to them they were not going to be able to take it out with the eight 2,000-pound bombs they were carrying. The airmen quickly decided to fly four racetrack patterns, circular maneuvers over the target area, dropping a single laser-guided bomb each time they came to the causeway. Ordinarily, it was not a tactic that any pilot liked to execute. Attacking a target four times from the same angle made the planes vulnerable. But the airmen figured since there was no hope of dropping the causeway into the river, the flash and bang from eight discrete explosions might deter the Iraqis from trying to cross. Although some of the bombs found their mark, the pilots were under no illusions that they had destroyed the causeway. The Air Force could not put the cork in the bottle, and the Iraqis continued their flight north.23

At 2AM, Riyadh time, Schwarzkopf got another call in his sleeping quarters from Powell. The decision was now final. President Bush had decided to announce a cease-fire. But it had been moved to midnight EST, which would be 8AM in the Gulf.

Schwarzkopf had no problem with the change. If Washington wanted to run the war for an even 100 hours for public relations purposes, so be it. That would not make an appreciable change on the battlefield.

As he emerged from his room, Schwarzkopf informed Waller that Washington had decided to announce a cease-fire. Waller was astounded. The last he had heard, the cease-fire was a matter for discussion, not a fait accompli. Waller knew that the war was coming to a close, but now was not the time to end it. From an operational point of view, the war should not have ended until both escape routes were blocked by allied ground forces and the Republican Guard destroyed. Bombing at the choke points would not suffice.

"You have got to be kidding me. Why a cease-fire now?" Waller asked.
"One hundred hours has a nice ring," replied Schwarzkopf.
"That’s bullshit," Waller exclaimed.
"Then you go argue with them," replied Schwarzkopf.24

The brief exchange summed up the debate. In recommending an end to the war, Powell was motivated by considerations that went beyond military concerns. Determined that the military would erase the stain of Vietnam and come out of the Gulf War victorious with its honor intact, the JCS chairman wanted to avoid the impression that the United States was exploiting the situation and killing Iraqis for the sake of killing them. If that meant erring on the side of caution, Powell was prepared for that.

Powell consulted with his fellow chiefs, but he had long established himself as the dominant voice of the military and none challenged his assessment. Only Merrill McPeak, the Air Force chief of staff, thought it was premature to end the war, and he kept his views to himself.

Schwarzkopf, like the chiefs, also took his cues from Powell’s judgment. To his staff, Schwarzkopf could be hell on wheels, but he was not prepared to fight superiors in Washington. For months, he had said that the overriding goal was to destroy the Republican Guard. But throughout the planning and execution on the war, Schwarzkopf had yielded to Powell, whether the question was the development of the left hook, the number of reinforcements to be sent, or the decision to suspend air strikes in downtown Baghdad following the raid on the Al Firdos bunker. Now that the Iraqis were being routed, Schwarzkopf was prepared to subordinate the final destruction of the Republican Guard to the administration’s political goals. Protecting the United States military against the charge of brutalization and holding down American and Iraqi casualties in the final days of the war were becoming the main measures of merit in Washington. After the war, Schwarzkopf observed that he was never quite sure in talking with Powell when the general was
offering him a personal view or representing the views of the White House. “I never knew what was Powell, what was the JCS, what was the NGA [National Command Authority],” Schwarzkopf said. “I never had the ability to sort out what was Powell, what was Scowcroft, what was Cheney, what was the President.” Either way, Schwarzkopf was prepared to go with the flow.  

As for the senior civilians in the Bush administration, including Scowcroft and Cheney, they too saw an advantage in avoiding the impression that the United States was piling on. But they were also laboring under a misimpression. After hearing Powell’s presentation, Scowcroft and Wolfowitz thought the Republican Guard was essentially cut off and all but destroyed.  

After the timing was set at the White House, Cheney called Wolfowitz to inform him of the move. Wolfowitz was disturbed by the symbolism. The 100-hour war had a meaning in Arab history, Wolfowitz argued, and it was not a happy one. After President Nasser of Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain, France, and Israel had launched a lightning 100-hour war to seize the waterway, only to stop in the face of American pressure. The 100-hour war was synonymous in the Arab world with Western and Israeli aggression. Wolfowitz told Cheney that anything would be better than 100 hours.  

Cheney conferred with Scowcroft and came back with a quip. Would Wolfowitz be happier if the war was ended at 99 hours? The Bush administration had not been aware of the historical associations and did not think the American public would care either.  

Wolfowitz also questioned whether it was wise to announce a cease-fire. The allies wanted to keep the pressure on Saddam Hussein and encourage a coup. The allies could stop their advance without broadcasting that fact to the world. By telling the world that the ground war was over, the allies would in effect issue a reprieve to the Iraqi leader.  

Cheney reminded Wolfowitz that Schwarzkopf had boasted in his briefing that the allies could have gone to Baghdad but had no intention to do so. The damage was already done.  

Spotty intelligence, no doubt, affected the decision. Only after the war, when spy plane and satellite imagery was analyzed, would it become clear that half the Republican Guard equipment had not been destroyed and that the vast majority of the fleeing Iraqi army was still south of Basra in the path of the Army’s planned advance when the war ended.  

Even so, at the CIA, it did not look like the job had been done. Charles Allen’s office got a call from Ron Stanfill, who was working for Warden in Checkmate. The White House had decided to end the war.

Lt. Col. Michael Tanksley, an Army officer who worked on Allen’s warning team, threw up his hands in frustration. “One goddamn day too soon,” Tanksley exclaimed.  

Allen immediately called Richard Kerr, the deputy CIA director, but Kerr did not know anything about the decision to end the war.  

Other planners did not get the news until the next day. Arthur Hughes and other mid-level civilian officials at the Pentagon had just put the finishing touches on a February 22 memo on how to reduce Iraq’s military might and ensure that Saddam Hussein was dealt a humiliating defeat. The idea was to use the American Army to seal off the Euphrates valley. The Iraqi soldiers would then have to leave their equipment behind and march north. Hughes envisioned long lines of dispirited Iraqi troops leaving the battlefield like the German prisoners marching east after their defeat at Stalingrad during the Second World War.  

The plan was almost a mirror image of what McCaffrey and Peay had in mind. Hughes had hoped that the plan would be taken up when Cheney, Baker, and Scowcroft had a breakfast meeting on February 28, but by then the issue was decided.  

Even with limited intelligence and the verifiable “fog of war,” the war looked different in the Euphrates valley than it did at the White House. The closer one got to the battlefield, the more questionable the decision to end the war seemed. Neither McCaffrey nor his key commanders thought the entire Republican Guard had been destroyed. Nor did they believe that driving to the Basra canals to cut off the fleeing Iraqis would produce inordinately high American casualties or result in the wholesale slaughter of the Iraqi army. Much of the Iraqi force would have been bypassed and many would have been given a chance to offer their surrender. But the commanders who knew the most about the battlefield were not asked for their views.  

“There was a sense of success and a sense of concern at the same time,” recalled Col. Paul Kern, McCaffrey’s 2nd Brigade commander, who went on to become the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary William J. Perry. “My sense was we would have been able to continue the attack at about the same rate as the previous day. I figure we would have been there by early afternoon.  

“You are prepared to go. You are ready to go, and you have a good plan. Everything is in your favor. And then you stop and say why?” Kern added. “I knew that this would be a military decision that would be debated for years to come in terms of where we stopped. The sense was there: ‘success but.’”  

Steven Arnold, who had labored months over the war plan and over-
seen the XVIII and VII Corps attacks, was blunter still. “I hated to see us end the war when we did,” he recalled.27

Within minutes, however, it was clear that Washington’s plan for ending the war would have to be modified. Reconnaissance missions were reporting that substantial numbers of Iraqis with their equipment were continuing to escape. With the FSCLs moved north to the Euphrates and east to the coast, and with the Army still forty miles from the outskirts of Basra, Iraqi tanks were rolling over pontoon bridges and the causeway.

Schwarzkopf called Powell at 2:55AM and told him that if a cease-fire was announced, they would see T-72 tanks crossing the river. The Bush administration had to be made aware of that.

Powell told Schwarzkopf he would remove the condition from the president’s statement ordering the Iraqi soldiers to get off their vehicles and walk north. If Washington had thought about the end game in advance, it might have announced that stipulation to the Iraqis in the weeks leading up to the war. But it was impossible to get the word out now. Unless the Bush administration adjusted its demands, the Iraqis would be violating the terms of the cease-fire and the war would have to go on.

As far as Powell was concerned, the war was virtually over and the last-minute military activity was largely irrelevant. But Schwarzkopf was not happy with the exodus, and the XVIII and VII Corps received another call from Riyadh. Instead of shutting down the attack as Yeosock initially suggested, Schwarzkopf wanted the attack to be speeded up. Switching signals, Yeosock now told them he wanted maximum pressure; the corps should push as far as they could get — until 8AM, that is, when offensive operations would be abruptly brought to a halt. After being advised to wind down its attack, the Army was now being urged to start it up again.

In his command post near the Euphrates, McCaffrey roused his division. When the first word of a possible cease-fire had trickled down to his command, the general had delayed his artillery attack. But at 4AM he began a mammoth artillery barrage, shelling the Iraqis as they fled into the distance. McCaffrey himself was stunned by the whoosh of an ATACMS surface-to-surface missile as the rocket flew off into the sky. The roar was so loud McCaffrey thought it was an incoming Scud.

When the dust cleared, McCaffrey dispatched a reconnaissance patrol forward to just west of Rumaila oil field. It stopped at Phase Line Crush, a boundary the general had hoped would be the jumping-off point for his rush to the gates of Basra but which was now almost the outer limit of his advance. McCaffrey’s soldiers stopped short of the causeway, which McCaffrey assumed had been thoroughly destroyed by allied warplanes. In fact, the causeway was still standing, and the Iraqis were using it as their escape route through Basra to withdraw their forces from Kuwait. In the final frantic hours, the left hand had not known what the right was doing. It was another failure to coordinate between the Army and the Air Force.

At Franks’s headquarters, the VII Corps also moved to jump-start its delayed attack. Griffith’s 1st Armored Division let loose with everything it had, firing a violent artillery barrage and sending his Apaches forward.

While the attack divisions pawed the sand like impatient stallions, Yeosock called Franks with another mission: seize the Safwan road junction astride the intersection of the north-south route between Basra and Kuwait City. Safwan was close to where VII Corps forces would have ended up if they had completed their planned double envelopment, but Safwan crossroads itself had never been an objective. CENTCOM, however, had received reports that Iraqi vehicles were streaming north through the town.

“Wilco,” said Franks. Franks huddled with Cherrie. It was already 3 AM. Time was running out. The commanders discussed sending Rhame’s 1st Infantry Division to take the road junction. But the division was still frozen in place because of the VII Corps’s earlier concern over friendly fire. Somehow, in all the excitement, VII Corps had not lifted the restriction on the 1st Division.

At 4AM, Franks ordered Rhame to restart his attack and interdict the road junction.

The division responded, breaking its nine-hour standstill. Its helicopters got there in two hours, but the pilots saw only a handful of vehicles driving north. If Safwan had been an important escape hatch, it was not any longer.

By 7:30AM the VII Corps put a hold on all firing after reports of another fratricidal incident. Half an hour later, the radio nets came alive. The cease-fire was in effect. Amidst the confusion, Franks assumed that Rhame’s force had taken the road junction and that information was relayed to Yeosock. Only later would the VII Corps commander learn that he had misunderstood Rhame’s situation report and that Rhame’s ground forces never made it to the crossroads.28

At 8AM the Army guns fell silent. The last hours had been a confusing series of stop and start orders that had left the field commanders wondering whether they were to make a maximum effort to protect their troops or an all-out effort to destroy as much of the Iraqi army as they
could. Uncertain about its ultimate objective, the Army had staggered to a halt, short of the finish line.

The victory in the ground war had been dramatic and Kuwait had been wrested back from the Iraqis with minimal casualties to the allies. Yet even as CENTCOM basked in the glow of victory, it was evident that the allies had not accomplished all their goals.

In briefing the American commanders in October, Schwarzkopf had left no ambiguity about the Army’s mission. The Republican Guard were not to be routed, they were not to be made “combat ineffective.” They were to be destroyed. Yet after six months of planning, the coalition’s ground offensive never reached its logical culmination. Neither the ground offensive nor the bombing fully destroyed the Iraqi field forces, nor did they cut off the Iraqi escape routes.

On March 1, after the cease-fire, the American surveillance photos showed that 842 Iraqi tanks, a quarter of Iraq’s tanks in southern Iraq and Kuwait, and 1,412 Iraqi armored personnel carriers and other armored vehicles, half of all its APCs in the theater, had escaped.

But it was more than a matter of equipment. According to the CIA analysis of the photos, at least 365 of the tanks that escaped were T-72s that belonged to Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard. By the CIA’s count, the Republican Guard divisions had begun the war with 786 tanks. That meant half the Republican Guard armor got away. Since the Tawakalna and Medina divisions sought to hold off the Americans, Pentagon intelligence analysts later concluded that the Hammarabi Division escaped largely intact. According to intelligence estimates by the Defense Intelligence Agency, 70 percent of its troops managed to make their way north of the marshes.

Other Republican Guard and Army units escaped a company or a battalion at a time. Most important were the senior headquarters, which made it safely across the Euphrates and took charge of the routed Iraqi army, whipping it into shape and reconstituting the force so that it could suppress the Shiite uprising in the south. Notably, of the senior Iraqi officers captured during the war, only one was a Republican Guard officer. The devastation on the battlefield was considerable, but the gate had never been closed and a lot of the horses got out.

To this day Schwarzkopf blames Franks for being too slow and letting too many Iraqis escape before the cease-fire. With Schwarzkopf’s unhappiness with Franks echoing through the Army, the Jedis prepared a classified study of the CENTCOM rates of advance. The Army attack had not been far off schedule. It had taken the VII Corps about ten
hours longer to engage the Republican Guard than had been projected, 
not a huge delay given the daunting logistics and the challenges of ma-
neuvering a large armored force in the desert, but enough to enable the 
Iraqi army to get a head start in its escape north.

There is little doubt that Franks, however, could have been more 
aggressive. But Schwarzkopf had the advantage of seeing the big pi-
cture. Information from the Marines and intelligence from a variety of 
ources made him aware that the Iraqis were fleeing north and likely to 
escape the Army’s wide envelopment from the western desert.

The disconnect between Schwarzkopf and his corps commander 
might have been avoided if CENTCOM had established a better com-
mand structure. It was Yeosock’s responsibility to keep the two corps in 
harness and driving forward, but he was reluctant to assert his role as 
commander of Army ground forces and was thoroughly intimidated by 
the CENTCOM commander. In dodging his responsibilities, he frus-
trated Schwarzkopf, who felt compelled to deal directly with the corps 
commanders. Schwarzkopf’s jumping in and out did nobody any good 
and confused command relations during the offensive.

Schwarzkopf had a golden opportunity to rid himself discreetly of his 
ineffectual commander when Yeosock suffered a gallbladder attack 
in mid-February. The logical move was for Schwarzkopf to name Waller, 
his deputy, to take Yeosock’s place. But Schwarzkopf’s sense of loyalty 
took precedence over his military judgment. For all his bombast, 
Schwarzkopf was not tough enough.

Having made the mistake of retaining Yeosock, Schwarzkopf com-
pounded it on the eve of the ground war. He knew that Franks was not 
the aggressive commander he wanted to lead the main attack, but in-
stead of sending the Third Army commander forward to the front lines 
to oversee his performance and that of Luck’s XVIII Airborne Corps, 
Schwarzkopf permitted Yeosock to run the war from his headquarters 
in Riyadh, more than three hundred miles behind the front. When the 
offensive kicked off, there was no senior field commander on top of the 
two attacking Army corps. Waller saw the weakness in the command 
arrangements and had earlier recommended that Yeosock or his staff go 
forward. Being Schwarzkopf’s deputy he was reluctant to suggest that 
he be the one. He later regretted that he did not press the issue.

Schwarzkopf, however, also bore considerable responsibility for the 
failure to destroy the Republican Guard. He failed to “read” his enemy 
and fell into the very trap he sought to avoid, that of being mechanical 
in his planning. A key assumption in his plan was that the Iraqis would 
stand and fight as they had done during the Iran-Iraq War. By G day 
there was sufficient evidence to question that assumption. The battle of 
Khafji demonstrated that the Iraqis would not be able to maneuver in 
the open desert in the face of American airpower and that their defen-
sive strategy was doomed. Further, after the Iraqi defeat at Khafji, and 
intelligence reports of desertions and demoralization of the Iraqi field 
forces, there was reason to believe that the Iraqis would not defend in 
place, but retreat as soon as the Marines attacked.

But no significant changes were made to the ground-war plan after 
the Khafji battle. Dominated by the massive logistical requirements of 
moving hundreds of thousands of men and tons of war material into 
position into the desert, CENTCOM lost track of the big picture. Its 
military planning had become essentially an industrial enterprise.

Schwarzkopf stuck with the plan to lead with the Marine assault and 
launch the main Army attack against the Republican Guard the next 
day. While he was concerned over the deliberate pace of the VII Corps 
attack, Schwarzkopf never insisted that the plan be changed. He ac-

THE GATE IS CLOSED
cepted the Army's plan for a ponderous seven- to ten-day operation without demurral. No alternate plan was developed in the event the Iraqi defenses collapsed.

When the Marines attacked and the Iraqis broke, Schwarzkopf's strategy for destroying the Guard and the Iraqi field army unraveled. The Marine attack prompted the Iraqis to signal a general retreat while the Army attack was barely under way. When he tried to speed up the VII Corps attack, the Army plan proved to be inflexible. Improvisation proved to be no substitute for good preliminary planning.

McCaffrey argued with some justification after the war that it would have made more sense to launch the XVIII Airborne attack two days before the rest of the allied offensive and limit the Marines to skirmishing along the border for several days. Only after the Army left hook was well under way should the Marines have been allowed to undertake their dash to the gates of Kuwait City, McCaffrey said. That would have enabled the allies to steal a march on the Republican Guard.

But in Schwarzkopf's command, the war plan was joint more in name than in fact. Each service was allowed to attack the way it preferred, with little thought about how an attack in one area would affect the fighting in another. Schwarzkopf yielded too unhingly to the Marines' demand that they be given a major piece of the war and accepted more than he would later acknowledge Franks' mind-set that the Iraqis were a determined enemy that was prepared to stand and fight.

Nor did Schwarzkopf have a plan to reap the full fruits of victory as he brought the war to a close. Had McCaffrey and Peay been allowed to carry out their plans to bracket Basra with American forces — even if Schwarzkopf had to stand up to Powell, Cheney, and the White House to get time to do it — CENTCOM would have been able to bottle up most of the escaping Iraqis and force them to surrender their weapons before marching north.

"The end game: it was bad," recalled McCaffrey after the war. "First of all, there was confusion. The objectives were unclear. And the sequence was wrong. They probably should have sent us forty-eight hours before the Marines."29

But even as the fighting drew to a close, the sparks from the Persian Gulf War ignited an uprising that spread across northern and southern Iraq. One war was over, but another war — the one between Saddam Hussein's regime and his own people — had just begun.

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**"I Survived Desert Storm"**

Kuwait destroyed by Saddam. Iraq destroyed by combined forces. But Saddam is still in his chair.

— Mehdy Nathil
April 3, 1991
Interviewed at an abandoned cement plant near Highway 8, Iraq

Question: I'm struck by how somber you feel. And I was wondering, aren't these great days?

Answer: You know, to be very honest with you, I haven't yet felt this wonderfully euphoric feeling that many of the American people feel. And I'm beginning to. I feel much better about it today than I did yesterday. But I think it's that I want to see an end. You mentioned World War II — there was a definite end to that conflict. And now we have Saddam Hussein still there — the man that wreaked this havoc upon his neighbors.

— President Bush
Press conference on the Persian Gulf War
White House,
March 1, 1991

| AN NAJAF, the news spread quickly. Allied forces were sweeping across southern Iraq and the Iraqi army was on the run. An Iraqi soldier had aimed his machine gun at one of the ubiquitous portraits of Saddam Hussein as his unit retreated through Basra and fired away. There was a power vacuum along the Euphrates. |
Like the Kurds to the north, the Shiites had suffered decades of oppression at the hands of Baghdad. Before the war, Saddam Hussein wrapped himself in the mantle of Islam, even ordering that Allahu Akbar (“God is Great”) be added to the Iraqi red, white, green, and black flag. In fact, the Iraqi leader, like many of his top aides, was a power-hungry secularist who fancied military uniforms and symbols over religious ones. Saddam Hussein was also a Tikriti, born in Sunni country, a hundred miles north of Baghdad. The Baghdad regime viewed the Shiites, who lived in the marshes along the Euphrates and outnumbered the Sunnis, as a potential internal threat to be closely monitored by the secret police.

Over the years, Saddam Hussein tried to coopt the Shiites by appointing them to government and military posts and by embracing Islam. But when power and privilege could not buy obedience, Baghdad did not hesitate to crack the whip. The Shiites had a history of asserting themselves when they thought there was a weakening of central authority — sometimes with disastrous results to themselves. Throughout the 1970s, antigovernment demonstrations in the Shiite cities along the Euphrates were brutally put down, Shiite clerics and their families were executed, and tens of thousands of Shiites were exiled to Iran.

The Gulf War heightened the Shiites’ grievances toward Baghdad — and emboldened them. From their bunkers in Baghdad, the Iraqi leadership had been defiant. But when the allied bombs began to fall, the price of flour began to soar and the salaries of workers in the cities along the Euphrates were suspended. Electricity and telephones were cut off. Little gasoline was available, and the only water supply came directly from the river. It seemed as if Iraq had been propelled a hundred years back in time, the leaders of the Shiite rebellion later recalled.

Before the ground war, there had been manifestations of dissent in An Najaf, one of the holiest of Shiite towns. In February, Yusef al-Hakim, a Shiite religious leader, died. As the funeral procession moved through the An Najaf streets on February 13, crowds began chanting: “There is no God but God” and “Saddam is the enemy of God.” Iraqi secret police men stalked the procession and rounded up hundreds of Shiites.

Now with the Iraqi army in full retreat and the allies marching ever closer, the Shiites’ brewing resentment was boiling into a case of full-fledged insurrection.

The Shiites had turned to Western radio broadcasts because they believed that it was the allied powers that would decide the future of Iraq. With Iraq’s electrical grid shut down, Baghdad’s jamming of foreign radio stations had also ceased and the broadcasts were coming in clearer than ever.

On the Voice of America, Radio Monte Carlo, the British Broadcasting Company, and clandestine radio stations, like the CIA-equipped but Saudi-operated Voice of Free Iraq, the Shiite leaders in An Najaf learned both of the magnitude of the Iraqi defeat and President Bush’s call for the ouster of Saddam Hussein. For the long-suppressed enemies of the Saddam Hussein regime, it looked like the moment to strike. In An Najaf, Karbala, An Nasiriyah, and Basra, the planning for a Shiite revolt shifted into high gear. In the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq, the Kurds also saw an opportunity to break away from Baghdad’s domination.

Iraq did not have enough forces to put down the Kurdish and Shiite rebellions simultaneously. It did, however, have somewhat more than CENTCOM had thought. The devastation on the battlefield was considerable. But when the dust cleared, no American forces were astride the Hawr al Hammar causeway east of Basra. No American forces were sitting astride the Basra canals. The gate had never been closed.

At his command post south of the Euphrates, Barry McCaffrey was already beginning to pick up reports that an insurgency was brewing to his north. But McCaffrey was not focusing on the turmoil in Iraq. He was still looking at the Iraqi army that had escaped to the east.

When the cease-fire was declared on the morning of February 28, McCaffrey’s most forward troops were at the edge of the Rumaila oil field. Their final battle had been west of the causeway — one of the Iraqi military’s principal escape routes — at an artificial boundary dubbed Phase Line Knife.

Even though President Bush had proclaimed a cease-fire, McCaffrey’s officers wanted to continue the advance. Col John LeMoyne, the commander of the division’s 1st brigade, went to McCaffrey on two occasions and told him the 24th needed to keep rolling forward, LeMoyne recalled after the war.

It was clear to LeMoyne that the military’s task was not done. Soon after the cease-fire was declared, some of the fleeing Iraqis began doubling back and retrieving the weapons and equipment they had abandoned. By continuing the march, LeMoyne also figured the forward troops from the 24th Mech could make sure that the Iraqis could not set up artillery positions within range of the Americans.

McCaffrey finally agreed to LeMoyne’s request. The aggressive general had a liberal interpretation of the cease-fire arrangements and it did not include staying in place. “We continued to press on to clear the zone out in front,” recalled Col. Paul Kern, the commander of the division’s 2nd
Brigade. “There was no limit or boundary designated, only that we were to stop shooting. Our view was that we would continue to move forward as far as we could and clear as much zone in our area as we could.”

In the day following the cease-fire, McCaffrey's 24th Mech, Starr's 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the division's artillery advanced about five to ten miles beyond Phase Line Knife, aligning themselves just to the west of the causeway. Meanwhile, McCaffrey's reconnaissance units began patrolling an area that extended to Phase Line Crush, a limit of advance the division set to the east of the causeway.

After the war, McCaffrey said he had not attached any particular strategic significance to his advance. He had assumed wrongly that the causeway had been destroyed by allied bombing. But in creeping forward, McCaffrey had aligned his forces along one of the Iraqi main remaining escape routes and inadvertently set the stage for a confrontation with the Iraqis. One of the Army's biggest clashes was about to begin, but it would not take place until after the war.

That the battlefield was still chaotic was clear. The battered Iraqi force was operating without reliable intelligence and was not sure just where the Americans forces were. On March 1, there was light skirmishing as the Iraqi forces tried to escape the Americans' clutches but instead blundered into them.

At 1AM, soldiers from LeMoyne's brigade confronted a busload of Iraqi soldiers driving west on Highway 8. Panicked by the Americans, the Iraqis started shooting at point-blank range. LeMoyne's troops returned fire. Seven Iraqis were killed and six wounded in the exchange. LeMoyne's troops also exchanged mortar and artillery fire with the Iraqis. That, however, was just a portent of what was to come.

It was on March 2 at 3AM that LeMoyne began to sense that something bigger was brewing. His scouts were reporting that enemy vehicles were moving along their front, and the alert was confirmed by OH-58 Delta helicopters and a JSTARS radar surveillance plane. The Iraqi force was sizable, consisting of hundreds of vehicles, including trucks, T-72 tanks, Frog missile launchers, and armored personnel carriers. LeMoyne's 1st Brigade, the northernmost of McCaffrey's unit, which was deployed astride the approaches to the causeway, appeared to be in the Iraqis' path.

Having done their best to escape the allied onslaught, the Iraqis were not looking to launch a headlong attack into an American mechanized division. With Basra jammed with fleeing Iraqi soldiers, they were trying to find an alternative route home over the causeway. But to LeMoyne, the Iraqis' intentions were unclear.

"We did not know about the causeway," LeMoyne recalled. "We thought: where are these guys going?"

With the Americans unaware that the causeway was intact and the Iraqis operating with poor command and control, and neither side sure of the other's intentions, it would not take much to set off a fight.

At 8AM, the first shot was fired when an Iraqi outpost protecting the Rumaila oil field saw an American Bradley fighting vehicle, got scared, and fired a rocket-propelled grenade. The Iraqi troops who fired the grenade surrendered almost immediately. But a column of Iraqi tanks to their rear saw the action and began to fire their guns and antitank missiles.

That was enough for McCaffrey. After four days of traversing terrible terrain in wind and rain, but with only sporadic action, the 24th Mech was ready to pounce on any Iraqi forces at the first indication that they were not complying with the cease-fire.

The Americans launched a merciless attack. LeMoyne ordered Apache attack helicopters to fly north of the causeway and seal off the Iraqi escape route. Then, five battalions of McCaffrey's artillery fired mines and other cluster munitions at the causeway as well as to the south of the Iarqis, bracketing the enemy.

The Air Force was eager to join in the fight, but this was one battle the Army was determined to handle by itself. Although the Americans refrained from attacking Iraqi armored concentrations north of the Euphrates or southeast of the battle area, the trapped column of Iraqi forces near the causeway was deemed to be fair game. With the Iraqis boxed in, the division polished off the enemy. All told, 346 armored vehicles were destroyed, including thirty T-72 tanks. It was one of the most intense and one-sided fights of the war. Overwhelmed by the American fire, hundreds of Iraqis abandoned their vehicles and fled into the marshes, leaving muddy footprints in the sand.

McCaffrey and his aides insisted that they were not trying to provoke a fight. Yet they acknowledged, in retrospect, it was clear that the Iraqis were not looking to do battle with the allies.

The Iraqi armored columns “either did not know we were there or thought they could drive through us under terms of the cease-fire agreement,” McCaffrey said after the war.

Added Kern, “I think they just blundered in. They had very poor intelligence and poor leadership.”

But some of McCaffrey's fellow Army officers in the nearby VII Corps thought the general had used a relatively minor exchange of fire as an excuse to pummel the Iraqi forces that had been put off-limits by
the early cease-fire. Colonel Cherrie, the VII Corps operations officer, believed that the VII Corps rules of engagement would have precluded it from continuing to move its troops forward or launching the disproportionate fusillade ordered by McCaffrey.

Asked what led to the battle, one senior Army officer in Riyadh aptly expressed the view of much of the Army leadership. "I do not know, and I do not want to know," he said. With misgivings among the Army commanders over the premature decision to end the ground war, senior officers were not inclined to second-guess McCaffrey's attack.

Only later would McCaffrey's commanders learn that they might have dodged a bullet. During the fight at the casuway, LeMoyne was alerted by the Air Force that several Iraqi helicopters were flying southeast toward Basra. Since Iraq had not flown helicopters throughout the war and the helicopters were not a direct threat, LeMoyne advised that the Air Force leave the helicopters alone, and the choppers landed at the Basra airfield. Later, he was told that the helicopters might have been carrying the Iraqi generals for the cease-fire negotiations at Safwan.1

While McCaffrey was edging forward, Franks was not looking to expand his turf. The VII Corps commander had made it through the war with relatively few casualties and was determined not to suffer any unnecessary losses on the munition-laden battlefield. He had frozen his forces in place.

But while McCaffrey was pummeling the wayward column of Iraqi troops after the cease-fire, it became clear that it was Franks who had the problem in Riyadh. With the land war over and victory declared, Schwarzkopf had been searching for a place to conduct cease-fire negotiations with the Iraqi generals.

The symbolism was important. The political prerequisite was that the negotiations site be in Iraq, not in Kuwait City, as the Iraqis hoped. It had to be clear to the world that the Iraqis had been forced out of Kuwait and that it was the allies who were dictating the terms in Iraqi territory. There were a number of possible sites, but Schwarzkopf liked Safwan, just north of the Iraq-Kuwait border. Schwarzkopf had not ordered Franks to take the Safwan road junction until the last night of the war, but Safwan was at the nexus of two major highways, near an airfield, and represented one of the Army's deepest penetrations into Iraq—so Schwarzkopf thought. Based on reports from VII Corps, a 1st Infantry Division symbol had been placed squarely on the road junction near Safwan on the Army maps in Riyadh.

Schwarzkopf told Washington that cease-fire talks would be held there and the VII Corps was informed. Franks had not attached any special urgency to the CENTCOM request to take Safwan, but he believed Rhaman's 1st Infantry Division had taken the objective. Almost immediately, Franks, who had suffered through four days of second-guessing in Riyadh and Washington, received more bad news.

With the cease-fire deadline looming, the hard-charging Rhaman, who had insisted on being the first in the VII Corps to take the war to the Iraqis and lobbyed hard to play a major role in Franks's attack over the next four days, had not actually taken Safwan. Franks had assumed that Rhaman had his tanks at the road junction. But as it turned out, time ran out on the VII Corps attack, and the 1st Infantry Division had settled for flying helicopters there instead.

The episode crystallized all the confusion within the Army about the abrupt end of the war. CENTCOM had the Iraqis on the run and could have ended the war at any point and time of its choosing. It could have waited until McCaffrey's 24th was at the Basra canal, Peay's brigade north of Basra, and Rhaman's force at Safwan before stopping. However, it was the top generals in Riyadh and Washington, not the field commanders, who had determined when it was time to stop the war. The war had been concluded by setting an arbitrary time for ending hostilities. Powell had become concerned how the one-sided rout might appear in Washington and to the world. He did not wait until the ground commanders had their objectives in hand before calling it quits. The decision to end the war was determined more by political than military considerations.

The divergent interpretations of the postwar rules of engagement only compounded the problem. While McCaffrey had used the cease-fire to take more ground, Franks's punctilious observation of the cease-fire left his corps short of Safwan.

When Franks was informed by his staff that Rhaman had not seized Safwan, the usual gentlemanly Franks got on the phone to 1st Infantry Division commander. Erupting in a rare paroxysm of anger, Franks demanded to know who had reported that Safwan had been captured, according to an officer present.

In military terms, there had been nothing critical about capturing the site. By the time of the cease-fire, Safwan was no longer a key choke point in the Iraqi escape north. Most of the fleeing Iraqis were already north of the town, and the Republican Guard tanks and armored personnel carriers, not dependent on using the roads, were driving over the hard-packed desert. But politically, the failure to occupy the road junction was a visible reminder that the allies had fallen short of their goal.
and a gross embarrassment to Schwarzkopf. The CENTCOM chief had told Powell that the road junction was in American hands and the information had been conveyed to the White House. Not only had the allies failed to shut the gate but an Iraqi brigade still occupied the airfield near town, where the victorious coalition commander planned to deliver terms to his defeated opponent.4

Schwarzkopf might have charity chalked the matter up to the fog of battle and proposed another site. Franks, for one, suggested that the armistice meeting be held at the site of the battle of Medina Ridge, where Griffith's tanks had blasted the Iraqi armor. It was one of the VII Corps’ biggest triumphs, and the rows of burned and exploded Iraqi tanks provided a good photo op for the media. But Medina Ridge was far from the major roads. And Jalibah airfield, which Schwarzkopf later told the Iraqis had also been considered as a negotiation site, was covered with unexploded cluster bombs.

The CENTCOM commander felt he had been misled into believing Safwan was in American hands and ordered Franks to submit a written explanation of the incident. Still, Schwarzkopf wanted more than an explanation; he wanted action. Schwarzkopf was determined to negotiate a termination of the war at Safwan even if he had to start the war up again to do it.

On March 1, Schwarzkopf told Yeosock that the VII Corps was to take the road junction and airfield, forcing whatever Iraqi soldiers were there to leave. Franks and his aides scrambled to put together a plan. Cease-fire or not, the war was not over for Rhamé. He had not taken the road junction before; now he would have to fix it. A-10s and F-16s would back up a cavalry squadron beefed up with extra attack helicopters. The Americans would surround the Safwan airfield, then issue an ultimatum. The Iraqis would have to be out by 4 PM.

At 6:15 AM on March 2, a squadron of Rhamé's soldiers drove north, two troops abreast and with reconnaissance helicopters to the front, hoping to secure the negotiation site with some old-fashioned persuasion. But when they got to Safwan, the news was not good. The airfield was defended by five Iraqi battalions equipped with T-72s, T-55s, and ZSU-24 antiaircraft guns, and they had no intention of leaving.

The American troops tried to break the ice with the Iraqis by offering them food. Then, at 9 AM, the Iraqi commander of the units approached Capt. Ken Pope from “A” Troop.

Pope delivered the message to the Iraqis: they had to leave. The Iraqi colonel was defiant and confused by the request. He asked the Americans if they were aware they were in Iraq.

Pope said yes. He was there to secure the site for the cease-fire negotiations.

The Iraqi officer was both surprised by the reply and offended that the Americans were offering his men food. He ordered his men to prepare tea for “A” Troop to show that they were hosts in their own country. The Iraqi said that he had assumed the cease-fire talks would be held in Kuwait City.

The word went up the chain of command. The Iraqis outnumbered the Americans at Safwan, and they said they would not leave without orders from on high. McCaffrey was already tangling with the Iraqis, but he had the excuse that his forces had drawn Iraqi fire. Did the Army really want to risk another clash to take the road junction in the VII Corps zone?

When Yeosock spoke to Schwarzkopf, he cautioned that it could take a while to pry the Iraqis out of Safwan. The Iraqi commander had reported that his men were dug in and had been there for a long time, Yeosock explained, according to a confidential Army memorandum of the conversation. Afraid of angering Schwarzkopf, Yeosock noted in his memo that he did not say that the Americans had been feeding the Iraqis.

But Schwarzkopf was insistent. The JCS were upset that Safwan had not been taken, Schwarzkopf explained. The seizure of the town had been briefed to the White House by Powell. The matter had to be straightened out quickly. CENTCOM did not want any Iraqis near that location.

Schwarzkopf ordered Yeosock to send overwhelming force to surround the Iraqi commander and his troops. “Try to do it by a show of force to capture them or get them to withdraw,” Schwarzkopf ordered. “Capture him if he refuses to withdraw. If he attacks you, then return fire.”

“Ensure that Lieutenant General Franks understands the mission; I'm not sure of his ability to understand the mission,” Schwarzkopf said acerbically. Then Schwarzkopf told Yeosock to directly explain the operation to Rhamé. “You have an entire corps to work with,” Schwarzkopf said. “Use attack helicopters.”

The standoff continued until midmorning when a flight of A-10s zoomed past the airfield. Pope told the Iraqis that the planes would attack unless the Iraqis left. Finally, the Iraqis gave in. By noon, most of the Iraqis were on the road moving toward Basra.

After the episode, Franks wrote Schwarzkopf that there was no intent to disobey his orders or mislead him, but acknowledged that VII Corps had unintentionally submitted an erroneous report. Franks protected
the VII Corps staff and Rhame’s staff and took responsibility for the decision.

With time running out before the cease-fire, Franks wrote, Rhame had taken the road junction “from the air.” The helicopters saw six tanks but did not fire. The VII Corps had ordered a halt to shooting in Rhame’s area because of concern over friendly fire and in the confusion had failed to authorize Rhame to fire at any Iraqi targets at Safwan.

The explanation only made Schwarzkopf angrier. “There is not a military commander in the entire world who would claim he had taken an objective by flying over it,” he recalled.

If Franks had reported up the chain of command that he did not have time to occupy the road junction, Schwarzkopf later said, “I would have said you do not have to shoot but keep driving until you get there. I want it physically occupied.”

In Schwarzkopf’s command, it was better to play a little loose with the rules, as McCaffrey had done, than to be overly cautious. Schwarzkopf later unsuccessfully urged Powell to block Franks’s promotion to head of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, suggesting that Waller, an aggressive, if not particularly intellectual, officer, according to other Army officers, be given the position instead. Franks’s caution on the battlefield was not an example the Army should point to with pride, Schwarzkopf said, and when the controversy over Franks’s performance became known, the Army would be embarrassed.

“Colin said ‘You are right, I agree,’” Schwarzkopf recalled. But Franks, like Schwarzkopf, was a protégé of Gen. Carl Vuono, the Army chief of staff. Franks’s appointment, Powell explained, was a matter for the Army to decide.

While Schwarzkopf was worried about how the position of his troops on the battlefield would look in Washington, the commander in chief was having his own second thoughts and, in his own manner, was expressing them openly.

The air and land campaigns had been designed to weaken the Iraqi leader’s hold on power, although Washington had been ambivalent about making the overthrow of Saddam Hussein an objective. Bush had talked with Douglas Hurd, the British foreign minister, about having war crimes trials for the Iraqi leadership. And for the air-war planners, Saddam Hussein had been a target of opportunity and the destruction of his regime a goal. But since Washington had decided against sending ground troops to Baghdad, there was no guarantee that the war would topple the Iraqi leader.

Still, the war had been less decisive than President Bush had hoped.

Saddam Hussein was defeated on the battlefield and discredited in the eyes of military professionals. But the Iraqi leader held fast to the reins of power in Baghdad.

When President Bush announced the Safwan meeting in a March 1 news conference, he said that “nobody can be absolved from the responsibilities under international law on the war crimes aspect of that.”

Bush also repeated his call for a rebellion: “In my own view, I’ve always said it would be — that the Iraqi people should put him aside and that would facilitate the resolution of all these problems that exist, and certainly would facilitate the acceptance of Iraq back into the family of peace-loving nations.”

The inconclusive ending of the war seemed to weigh heavily on the president’s mind. “You know, to be very honest with you, I haven’t yet felt this wonderfully euphoric feeling that many of the American people feel,” President Bush confessed to a surprised White House press corps.

“And I’m beginning to. I feel much better about it today than I did yesterday. But I think it’s that I want to see an end. You mentioned World War II — there was a definitive end to that conflict. And now we have Saddam Hussein still there — the man that wreaked this havoc upon his neighbors.

“I just need a little more time to sort out in my mind how I can say to the American people it’s over finally — the last ‘I’ is dotted,” he added.

SAFWAN SNAFU

Once Safwan was secured, Schwarzkopf was eager to get on with the job of cementing the truce. The negotiations themselves were to be held in a large tent near the Safwan airfield.

The first efforts to arrange a meeting faltered when Prince Khalid complained that the Iraqi delegation to the meeting was too junior and not befitting a meeting with the allied high command. Schwarzkopf had been willing to go along but had deferred to his Saudi counterpart. Now that the allies had their victory, Schwarzkopf was eager to conclude an agreement that would allow him to expeditiously withdraw his troops.

Finally, the Iraqis proposed a high-level team. It was sending Lt. Gen. Sala Abud Mahmoud, Iraq’s III Corps commander, who had planned the battle of Khafji, and Lt. Gen. Sultan Hashim Ahmad, the chief of staff of the Ministry of Defense. The III Corps commander had survived the allied attempts to bomb him; he had survived Baghdad’s
unhappiness with the battle of Khafji, and he had survived the ground war. Now, he had a lead role in making peace with the Americans.

Back in Washington, Cheney’s top civilian aides were uncomfortable about the way the cease-fire arrangements were being handled by the generals. There was a long tradition in the American military of treating a vanquished foe with respect, but it was not very Middle Eastern. The coalition had sought for six weeks not to liberate Kuwait, but to “incapacitate” the Saddam Hussein regime and loosen its hold on power. But Schwarzkopf was not trying to put the Iraqi military in its place. The CENTCOM commander had already announced that the allies were not going to Baghdad. Now he seemed very eager to get to Safwan. For Schwarzkopf, diplomatic concerns were subordinated to the need to repatriate allied prisoners and go home.

Nor were the Pentagon civilians happy with the way Powell’s staff was handling the situation. Cheney’s aids had reviewed the skimpy guidance the JCS staff prepared for the Safwan meeting and found it woefully inadequate. Arthur Hughes and other mid-level officials drafted “supplementary guidance,” which sought to toughen the vague JCS instructions to Schwarzkopf by demanding, for example, that Iraq be required to disclose all of its sites of weapons of mass destruction. But the JCS staff rebuffed the request, saying that no special guidance was necessary for the military-to-military talks.

“Norm went in uninstructed,” a senior Bush administration official said. “He should have had instructions. But everything was moving so fast the process broke down. The generals made an effort not to be guided. It was treated as something that was basically a military decision, not one to be micromanaged.”

As the Iraqis approached the negotiations tent, Schwarzkopf insisted that everyone be searched for weapons before entering the tent and went first as an example.

Schwarzkopf raised the first issue: prisoners of war, according to a transcript of the meeting. It was a natural concern for a military that had seen its prisoners used as diplomatic bargaining chips by the North Vietnamese. But the Gulf War was not Vietnam. Iraq’s holding of allied prisoners was an open invitation for the coalition to continue the war. The Iraqis immediately agreed to allow Red Cross representatives to visit the prisoners and then to exchange them. The Iraqis had only a handful of allied prisoners. The allies had an estimated 60,000 Iraqis.

The Iraqis also agreed to provide the allies with the locations of their minefields on land and at sea. General Ahmad told Schwarzkopf that Iraq had never deployed any chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in Kuwait and assured the CENTCOM commander that Iraq would not launch any Scud missiles.

Then Schwarzkopf shifted the discussion to ways to prevent another clash between the forces, like the one between McCaffrey’s division and the retreating Iraqis the day before.

“We would now like to talk about safety measures since our troops are still close together. We had an unfortunate incident yesterday where our troops got in one more battle that we did not need,” Schwarzkopf said.

Ahmad complained about McCaffrey’s attack. “The ones you shot were drawing back,” the general said, referring to their attempt to maneuver across the causeway.

“Well, unfortunately, they shot first. But that is something we could argue about until the sun sets,” Schwarzkopf replied.

There was little to be gained by arguing over the fight and the two sides discussed cease-fire lines to prevent a repetition of the incident. Schwarzkopf pulled out a map of the allied positions and proposed a narrow mile-and-a-half buffer zone along the forward line of the allies’ advance.

The Iraqis agreed on the condition that it was not a temporary cease-fire line and that the allies would withdraw from Iraqi territory.

“Absolutely,” replied Schwarzkopf. “I assure you it has nothing to do with borders.”

But the Iraqi general was not very happy about the allied occupation of southern Iraq, however temporary, and protested that the allies had continued their offensive after the Iraqis had signaled a general retreat on the evening of February 25.

“After we have withdrawn from Kuwait and announced it on the television and radio, we did not hope or think that you would step in the Iraqi territory,” Ahmad said. “We are sure you know how much we paid after we announced the withdrawal on the radio and television, casualty-wise I mean.”

Schwarzkopf replied, “A lot of people paid with casualties for a very long time, that is not the subject we are here to talk about now. I think that we will leave that to history. I would also like to make sure we don’t accidentally shoot . . .”

Ahmad interrupted, “I have just mentioned this for history.”

“Again, history will be written long after you and I are gone,” Schwarzkopf responded.

The CENTCOM chief then broached the subject of Iraqi aircraft flights. Allied warplanes were still patrolling Iraq’s skies, and safety precautions needed to be taken to ensure that the coalition did not shoot down innocent aircraft.
Ahmad wanted to know why it was important for the allies to fly over Iraq at all.

"It is purely as a safety measure to make sure that we do not have any hostile aircraft attack us. It has no offensive intention at all. It is a defensive measure only," Schwarzkopf said. With each comment, Schwarzkopf was reassuring the Iraqis that they could breathe easy.

Then Khalid interjected, asking for a pledge that Iraqi border troops would never again cross into Saudi territory. "We will stop our soldiers and yours," Ahmad replied, striking a defiant tone.

Schwarzkopf asked solicitously if there were any additional matters the Iraqis wanted to discuss.

"We have a point, one point," Ahmad said. "You might very well know the situation of the roads and bridges and communications. We would like to agree that helicopter flights sometimes are needed to carry some of the officials, government officials, or any member that is needed to be transported from one place to another because the roads and bridges are out."

Schwarzkopf magnanimously conceded the point. To CENTCOM, helicopters had never been much of a threat. With the allied jets dominating the skies, the Iraqis had been afraid to fly helicopters against allied forces through the ground war.

"As long as it is not over the part we are in, that is absolutely no problem," Schwarzkopf said. "So we will let the helicopters, and that is a very important point, and I want to make sure that's recorded, that military helicopters can fly over Iraq. Not fighters, not bombers."

The Iraqi general seemed surprised that he had so easily obtained the concession and made it clear that the Iraqis wanted to fly armed helicopters. "So you mean even the helicopters that is armed in the Iraqi skies can fly, but not the fighters?" he asked somewhat incredulously.

"Yeah," Schwarzkopf answered. "I will instruct our Air Force not to shoot at any helicopters that are flying over the territory of Iraq where we are not located. If they must fly over the area we are located in, I prefer that they not be gunships, armed helos, and I would prefer that they have an orange tag on the side as an extra safety measure."

What CENTCOM had agreed to was better than anything the Iraqi negotiators might have reasonably expected. While the helicopters were of little concern to the Americans, they were a fearsome weapon as far as the Shiites and the Kurds were concerned. Helicopters had been a punishing weapon against the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, and unlike the Afghan rebels, the Shiites and the Kurds had not been equipped by the CIA with Stinger antiaircraft missiles. By attacking the insurgents with helicopters, the Iraqi army could panic their adversary and range deeply to strike at civilians far from the front lines.

The decision reflected Schwarzkopf's surprising disinterest in the internal situation in Iraq. The entire focus of the discussions had to do with the risk the Iraqi forces posed to the allies, not with the fighting in Iraq.

Ahmad immediately responded by assuring Schwarzkopf that Iraqi helicopters would not venture near the allies and by giving the Americans a breakdown of the forty-one allied prisoners held. The Iraqis, he said, had only 2,098 Kuwaitis, a far cry from the 30,000 Kuwaiti prisoners the Americans believed Baghdad was holding.

After a short break to look at Schwarzkopf's map, the Iraqis raised a sensitive point. The Iraqi general complained that the Americans had inched forward after the cease-fire. Saifwan itself, Ahmad noted, had been under Iraqi control at the end of the war. Now, Schwarzkopf was including the newly seized territory on the allied side of the cease-fire line.

Schwarzkopf sought to cut off the discussion of what was an embarrassing issue for CENTCOM by offering a blanket assurance. "There will not be one single coalition force member in the recognized borders of Iraq, as soon as, as rapidly as we can get them out," Schwarzkopf said. "I know the general understands that sometimes it takes a little bit longer to move out then it does to move in, because we will have gasoline trucks, petroleum, ammo, but we will move out, and you have my guarantee."

It was an extraordinary assurance. The United States might have used its occupation of southern Iraq to press for further demands. It might have insisted that the Iraqis reach a new political accommodation with the Shiites and Kurds, or at least not attack them. It might even have pressed for the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime. But it did none of this.

Before she left the post of prime minister, Margaret Thatcher had suggested to Prince Bandar that the allies might occupy and exploit the Rumaila oil field until they had recouped the cost of the war and had their other demands met. Having fought his way to the Rumaila oil field, McCaffrey did not see why allied forces should not sit on it until the allies' demands were satisfied, even if it took five years.

Barring such bold diplomacy, the allies might simply have fudged the question and avoided offering the Iraqis any assurance that the coalition force would rapidly withdraw and would refrain from interfering with helicopter operations inside Iraq. With two Army corps deep in Iraq,
command of the skies, and the Iraqi military in a state of disarray, Washington would never again be in such a strong position to press its demands. Yet Schwarzkopf, and his civilian masters in Washington, let the moment pass.

Still, there was plenty of second-guessing behind the scenes in Washington of Schwarzkopf’s performance. “I did not like it,” recalled Brent Scowcroft, referring to the commander’s decision to grant an exception for helicopter flights. “My inclination was to repudiate it. But the majority did not want to do that. That would be a major repudiation of Schwarzkopf.”

At the Pentagon, Paul Wolfowitz thought that Safwan had been a lost opportunity. “The thing that disturbed us was that Schwarzkopf was ready to meet at the junior level until Khalid put his foot down,” Wolfowitz recalled. “The military’s attitude was we have won. Let’s cut this cleanly and not let the civilians load us with a lot of missions. Safwan was too hasty and too dignified.”

In Riyadh, Buster Glosson told his aides who were dismantling the Black Hole that Safwan was the handiwork of Army generals who were preoccupied with drawing cease-fire lines in the sand and establishing terms for the withdrawal of their ground forces — and who were blind to the use of airpower and the broader political and diplomatic ramifications of the Iraq conflict.

After the war, Glosson reflected: “The only reason we gave them permission was that there was no airman in the tent at Safwan. If Horner had been at Safwan, he would not have given the Iraqis permission to fly, except a few flights around Baghdad. We would not have agreed to give them a field day against the Shiites.”

It did not take long for the Iraqis to take advantage of the loophole they wrung from the allies at Safwan. For the first three days after the ground war, the Shiites encountered little organized resistance to their anti-Saddam demonstrations and rebellions across the Euphrates valley.

But soon after the Safwan meeting, Saddam Hussein began to crack down in earnest. Not only had the Iraqi commanders salvaged half of the Republican Guard and many of their other units from the Kuwait theater of operations, but they had saved their command headquarters units. That enabled them to quickly organize the remnants of their field army into a cohesive force.

Because the Iraqi military was stretched thin, Baghdad decided to take on the insurgent forces sequentially. First, they would suppress the Shiite revolt. Then they would concentrate on the Kurds in the north.

Along Highway 8, the east-west route that ran from An Nasiriyah to Basra, the American soldiers could tell that Saddam Hussein was mercilessly putting down the rebellion. By day, refugees were streaming south, looking for medical aid and shelter, seeking protection in the shadow of the American Army and telling tales of atrocities in Basra, Karbala, and An Najaf. At Checkpoint Bravo, which Ron Griffith’s soldiers had established along the highway, the tales at the medical tent had a common theme: indiscriminate fire at men, women, and children, the destruction of Islamic holy places, in which the Shiites had taken refuge, helicopter and rocket attacks, threats of chemical weapons attacks.

Iraqi special forces and regular army troops attacked Karbala on March 8, using mortars and tanks. The Shiites fought back, using rocket-propelled grenades and light arms that had been stored by the Iraqis in the town as a precaution against an allied attack. But they were quickly overwhelmed when Saddam Hussein’s forces struck back with artillery and helicopter gunships, forcing thousands of Shiites to flee.

An Najaf, which many of the leaders of the Shiite Intifadah had made their home base, was hit the next day. The Shiite defenders tried to resist, using the light arms stored at the Training Center for Enlisted Men, but were overcome.

Shiite leaders from An Najaf headed south to seek support from the allied liberators of Kuwait. But when some of the Shiites reached the American lines, they were puzzled at the Americans’ refusal to get involved. Instead of providing the Shiites with arms, the Americans were blowing up the arms caches in southern Iraq. That was in keeping with Schwarzkopf’s order to shrink the Iraq arsenal, but it deprived the overmatched Shiites of one of their few means of obtaining weapons.

The Shiites went to look for the French, finally finding them near As Salman. But they were not interested in helping either, and some of the Shiites eventually joined the exiled Iraqi resistance in London.

In Washington, the war had simultaneously done more and less than the administration had hoped. During the long months leading up the war, Bush had portrayed Saddam Hussein as worse than Hitler and described the liberation of Kuwait as a battle between good and evil.

Washington had not been willing to take the risk of sending its troops to Baghdad. Instead, the Bush administration sought to undermine Saddam Hussein through air attacks on Iraq’s command centers, communications, and electrical system, and ground attacks on the Republican Guard, hoping for a coup from the ranks of the Iraqi military.

The goal was the replacement of one Iraqi dictator by another Iraqi
strongman committed to holding Iraq together. One reason for insisting on the rapid exchange of prisoners, recalled Gordon Brown, Schwarzkopf's foreign policy adviser, was the calculation that the tens of thousands of returning Iraqi prisoners would spread the word about Baghdad's humiliation on the battlefield and undermine the Saddam Hussein regime. Instead, the allied attacks had sparked two ethnically based uprisings that the Bush administration neither wanted nor anticipated. And while the Iraqi leader was discredited in the eyes of military professionals, he was still in control and determined to ruthlessly suppress any challenges to his authority.

While the Bush administration knew little of the Shiites and was wary of them, the rush of pathetic refugees, all pledging their implacable opposition to Washington's most disreputable foe, to allied controlled territory gave them an international audience.

Safwan was soon overshadowed by a crowded camp of 11,500 refugees in the heart of the town. Desperate to avoid repatriation to Iraq, the refugees posted signs throughout the town begging the Americans not to leave and they staged noisy demonstrations for the reporters who ventured north from Kuwait.

As the refugees continued to stream toward Safwan, American soldiers along Highway 8 urged them to return home. But with the Iraqi army at their backs, the Shiites explained they had nowhere to go. Some of the Shiites produced military identification cards and demanded to be taken prisoner. Others camped near the roadside, waiting to see if Washington would change its mind and telling the press of the Iraqi attacks on their families and holy sites.

In a dilapidated trailer off Highway 8, Mehdy Nathil, a Shiite who had fled from Saddam Hussein's troops, said, "Bush told us to revolt against Saddam. We revolt against Saddam. But where is Bush? Where is he?"

Four days after the Safwan meeting, Secretary of State Baker flew to Saudi Arabia with some ideas about how to secure the peace. The plan Baker carried was developed by Robert Kimmitt and Thomas Pickering, Washington's ambassador to the United Nations. Pickering had proposed that a demilitarized zone be established by the United Nations in southern Iraq, putting all of Iraq south of Basra off-limits to Iraqi forces, and that allied troops patrol the area.

Pickering was confident that he could get the idea through the United Nations. The Deputies Committee, an interagency panel of high-ranking officials that included Adm. David Jeremiah, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, discussed the idea for two days.

The plan had a military and political component. Militarily, any Iraqi intrusion into the zone would provide Kuwait and Saudi Arabia with substantial early warning in case the Iraqis ever again tried to threaten the Gulf states. Politically, the establishment of the zone would diminish Iraqi authority over southern Iraq, including its Rumaila oil field. The allies would have leverage over Baghdad's future oil production. The zone would also cover part of the highway from Amman to Baghdad, allowing the allies to crack down on sanctions busting from Jordan.

But the scope of the newly minted plan was still a matter of debate, and it had its critics within the administration. When Lt. Gen. Howard Graves, the JCS representative on the trip, received a call from the Pentagon on the flight to Riyadh, it became clear to Paul Wolfowitz that the JCS was having second thoughts about the idea of establishing a demilitarized zone, seeing it as a potential snare in its effort to expedite the withdrawal of American forces.

Nor was the State Department enthusiastic about the idea of helping the Shiites. Wolfowitz argued that the Shiites of Iraq were different from the Shiites of Iran, the point being that affording a measure of protection to the Shiites of Iraq would not encourage the expansion of anti-American Islamic fundamentalism. "For one thing, they're Arabs, not Persians," he told John Kelly, the senior Middle East official at the State Department. But Kelly stopped him short.

"So are the Hizballah," quipped Kelly, referring to the Lebanon-based terrorists. The State Department's top Middle East hands tended to associate the Iraqi Shiites with the Iranian fundamentalists to the east.

In fact, the State Department policy-makers knew little about the Iraqi Shiites. Iraq's Shiites had been loyal members of Baghdad's army in Saddam Hussein's eight-year war with Iran and, with some notable exceptions, did not favor attaching their region to Iran.

It was Schwarzkopf himself who delivered the mortal blow to the plan for a security zone. Having promised the Iraqis that the allied forces would withdraw, which he wanted to do anyway as soon as possible, the CENTCOM commander was dead set against the demilitarized zone. When he met with Baker, Schwarzkopf argued that a security zone would have no military value and would delay the withdrawal of American forces from the region.12

After meeting with Schwarzkopf, Baker huddled with his team. Robert Kimmitt and Wolfowitz disagreed with the commander's assessment,
but the top generals had made their objections known and the civilians were reluctant to challenge them.

Pickering’s proposal for a security zone died at birth. But it was not the only plan to challenge Saddam Hussein’s authority that was rejected by CENTCOM’s senior leadership. One day after Baker arrived in Riyadh, Steven Arnold put the finishing touches on “The Road to Baghdad.” As the Army’s chief operations officer, Arnold knew the civilians needed alternatives in case they wanted to help the Iraqi insurgents topple the Saddam Hussein regime and seize Baghdad.

The goal, Arnold wrote in the still-secret plan, would be to remove Saddam Hussein and the Baathists from power, install a friendly political regime, stabilize the situation, and “increase US/Western influence in SWA [Southwest Asia]/Middle East through long-term military presence in the region.” Iraq would be left with a sufficient defense capability to ward off encroachments by Syria and Iran, but the forces loyal to Saddam Hussein would be destroyed once and for all.

Arnold outlined three possible routes for a march to the gates of the Iraqi capital, using Civil War names to mark the possible lines of advance. The Army’s VII Corps would oversee the attack, though some of the forces could be drawn from the XVIII Airborne Corps as well. Logistics would be stretched. But Arnold figured that no more than two Army divisions and one armored calvary regiment would be necessary to surround the city, and he believed that the Army had enough fuel, trucks, and bridging equipment to pull it off. None of the American units would enter Baghdad. That would be left to American special forces and the insurgents.

Accompanying the plan was a prospective order:

USARCENT ATTACKS ON ORDER ACROSS THE EUPHRATES RIVER AND SEIZES KEY TERRAIN VICINITY BAGHDAD TO PROVIDE LEVERAGE TO POLITICAL CEASEFIRE NEGOTIATIONS.13

When Arnold showed the plan to Yeosock, he was aghast. Yeosock told Arnold to stop working on it. Why plan for renewed hostilities when the campaign had been declared a brilliant and unqualified success? The very existence of “The Road to Baghdad” implied that the triumph had been less than complete. While it raised the possibility of a decisive victory, it also opened the door to a protracted occupation of Iraq, which was not the kind of war Powell or Schwarzkopf wanted. What was done was done. The Army really had only one plan now: to sit
tight until it deployed back home. “The Road to Baghdad” was never shown to Baker’s team and was relegated to the archive of top secret and never-used contingency plans.

With the generals reluctant to take on any new responsibilities in Iraq, it was the Saudis who kept alive the idea of helping the Shiites and trying to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime. When Baker met with Prince Saud, the Saudi foreign minister, and Prince Bandar, Riyadh’s ambassador to Washington, the Saudis used the meeting to express their concern about how the war was ending. They were unhappy that Saddam Hussein was still in power and wanted to launch a covert program of weapons deliveries to the Shiites, much like the American support to the Afghan resistance during the Soviet occupation. The goal would be to stir up trouble for Baghdad until the Saddam Hussein regime was overthrown. The Americans, the Saudis argued, should not worry that supporting the Shiites would lead to an expansion of anti-American and pro-Iranian influence in the Gulf, because the Shiites of Iraq were not like the Shiites of Iran, the Saudis explained. Not only were they Arabs, but they had supported Saddam Hussein throughout a bitter eight-year war against Iran. The Saudis had their problems with Iran’s Shiites, but they were more concerned about Saddam Hussein.

As Baker returned to Washington, the administration was at a crossroads. It could go along with the Safwan formula and extract American troops from the Gulf as quickly as possible. The allies would have liberated Kuwait and diminished Iraq’s offensive potential. But there would be no guarantee that the regime that started the war and still harbored hopes of militarily dominating the Gulf would fall. Washington would have to rely on United Nations inspections to prevent Baghdad from reviving its effort to develop weapons of mass destruction. Washington would be abandoning the Iraqi insurgents to their fate.

Or the administration could try to take advantage of the postwar upheaval in Iraq to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime. Building on the Saudi suggestion, the Americans could revise the Safwan accord, tell the Iraqis not to fly helicopters, funnel arms to the Shiites and Kurds, create military-protected enclaves in the south and north, and squeeze Iraq until Saddam Hussein was replaced. The administration had already established the predicate for further action. In the letter Baker had showed Tariq Aziz before the war, Bush had warned that he would hold Saddam Hussein personally responsible if the Kuwaiti oil fields were torched, and now the oil fields were aflame. There would be a slow and steady closing of the vise, not the furious air-land campaigns orchestrated by Powell and Schwarzkopf. The failure to close the gate on the Iraqi army would make this approach that much more of a challenge. Victory would not be assured and there would be no date certain for ending the war. But if the plan worked, the White House and its Saudi ally would have the definitive end it was looking for. The Saddam Hussein regime would be done for and would never again threaten the Gulf.

Bush, for his part, was initially pulled both ways. He wanted to bring Saddam Hussein to justice, but he had little ardor for continuing the fight. He did not want the Iraqis to attack the Shiites and Kurds with impunity, but he was afraid of the possible breakup of Iraq.

As the postwar arrangements were debated, the president and his men put aside the Saudi proposal for a covert program of assistance to the Shiites. Instead, the debate centered on the relatively narrow issue of whether the allies should impose a ban on helicopter flights.

During a March 13 visit to Ottawa to meet with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, President Bush publicly denounced the Iraqi helicopter attacks on the Shiites as a violation of the cease-fire. The attacks had to stop, he warned, before there was any “permanence to the cease-fire.” But after the press conference, Scowcroft and Haas quickly got Bush aside and explained that the Safwan accord did not ban Iraqi helicopter flights after all. Schwarzkopf had given the Iraqis a loophole.

For days afterward, administration officials continued to debate the pros and cons of repealing the Safwan exemption to fly helicopters.

The Bush administration was split. Wolfowitz favored action. F-15 pilots patrolling southern Iraq were watching helplessly as the Iraqis launched helicopter strikes against the Shiites. It did not matter what was agreed at Safwan. It was the allies who had won the war. If the military was worried about getting entangled in the fighting inside Iraq, the United States did not need to publicly take on the role of protector of the Shiites. Its public stance could be simply that it was rigorously enforcing the ban on postwar flights, he argued.

Cheney was sympathetic to the idea of shooting down the Iraqi helicopters, but more wary than Wolfowitz of being drawn into the fighting inside Iraq.

Scowcroft, while unhappy that Schwarzkopf had allowed the Iraqis to fly their helicopters, was concerned that the insurgents might be too successful. When asked why the United States did not help the Shiites after the war, Scowcroft said the reason was “geopolitics.”

Just as he did before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Scowcroft saw Iraq as a buffer against the expansion of Iranian power. “My view is there was
a real danger in the first few days that the country would fall apart and I was fundamentally not interested in seeing that. But I did not want to see the converse: that the Iraqis should be able to go after the Shiites,” Scowcroft recalled.

Baker was also reluctant to get involved in the fighting in Iraq.

Powell’s position was clear. He did not want additional missions, and argued that stopping the helicopter assaults would not stop the fighting. If the American military was called on to stop air attacks, would it next have to stop ground attacks? Powell wanted to extract the American military from Iraq as quickly and cleanly as possible.

At one point, Powell even got into a vociferous argument in his office with Edward “Skip” Gnehm, the American Ambassador to Kuwait, and with Hughes over the pace of the U.S. troop withdrawal from Kuwait. The ambassador warned Powell that the situation inside Kuwait was chaotic and unstable and that by withdrawing American forces precipitously Powell would also be pulling the rug out from under the Kuwaitis, who were trying to negotiate the release of their prisoners and return of their weapons—a negotiation that was never successfully consummated. Powell gave in on this point, but fought hard against helping the Shiites in Iraq.

Administration officials continued to debate the pros and cons of repealing the Safwan exemption to fly helicopters until Wolfowitz received an angry call from Powell, who complained that Pentagon civilians were telling the press that the question of enforcing a total ban on Iraqi helicopter flights was still open.

Shortly after that, the issue was closed. The Bush administration decided to pocket its battlefield success and let the fighting in Iraq run its course. Reporters were told that the White House had ruled out any intervention in the fighting inside Iraq, on the grounds that it would be opposed by the Arab allies even though it was Riyadh who wanted to pursue Saddam Hussein to the point of arming the Shiites. Reporters were also told that Turkey’s president, Turqit Ozal, opposed efforts to topple Saddam Hussein when Ozal’s views were the opposite.

“It was never our goal to break up Iraq. Indeed, we did not want that to happen, and most of our coalition partners (especially the Arabs) felt even stronger on the issue,” Bush insisted after the war. “I did have a strong feeling that the Iraqi military, having been led to such a crushing defeat by Saddam, would rise up and rid themselves of him. We were concerned that the uprisings would sidetrack the overthrow of Saddam, by causing the Iraqi military to rally around him to prevent the breakup of the country. That may have been what actually happened.”

The president and his men had not given up on the “definitive” solution they were looking for, but they were not willing to take any further military action to achieve it. American casualties had been much lighter than expected. There had been 613 casualties from the fighting: 146 American soldiers were killed in action, 35 by friendly fire; 467 had been wounded, 72 by fire from friendly units. In the weeks after the war, top officials predicted that Saddam Hussein would be overthrown within a year. The expectation was that the Iraqi leader would be deposed but that no American lives or treasure need be risked to make it happen.

After the parades and celebrations were over, however, the Bush administration found that the war had not really ended. CENTCOM’s war in the desert was over, but the confrontation between Washington and Baghdad persisted.

After pummeling the Shiites into submission, the Iraqis turned their full attention to the Kurds. By April, under pressure from Britain and Turkey, which wanted to avoid an influx of new Kurdish refugees, the United States established a militarily protected enclave for Kurdish forces in northern Iraq to stop Iraqi attacks in that part of the country. American air and ground forces were now committed to the defense of the Kurds in northern Iraq.

Frustrated by Saddam Hussein’s tenacious hold on power, the Bush administration said in May 1991 that economic sanctions would be maintained until Saddam Hussein was out of power.

Only after the war would Washington discover from Iraqi defectors that the Iraqi program to develop weapons of mass destruction was more extensive than it had anticipated. The economic embargo and the United Nations monitors became the main barriers to the rebuilding of Iraqi military power.

“Saddam Hussein’s plan to acquire nuclear weapons had been slowed, not halted, and Iraqi leaders are firmly committed to rejuvenating it,” the Defense Intelligence Agency noted in a March 1991 classified assessment. With 2,000 foreign-trained scientists, 18,000 engineers, and a network of Jordanian front companies, it was not a threat to be taken lightly. “Should sanctions and intrusive U.N. inspections cease, Iraq could produce a nuclear weapon in 2 to 4 years,” the DIA report said, adding that “Iraq still has a number of TU-22 Blinder bombers and MiG-25/Foxbat fighter-bombers with sufficient ranges and payloads to deliver nuclear weapons in theater.”

The DIA forecast that in the absence of economic sanctions and United Nations inspections it would take three to five years for Baghdad
to reconstitute its chemical weapons program and five to eight years to rebuild its program to develop biological weapons. As for Iraq's Scud missiles, American intelligence concluded after the war that Iraq had hidden many of them.  

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Iraq also tried to rebuild its conventional forces. Its army had shrunk from seventy to thirty-one divisions. The Republican Guard was reduced from twelve divisions to seven, most of which were garrisoned near Baghdad. Even so, the Iraqi divisions were not at full strength.

While the offensive potential of Iraq's army was limited, the forces were sufficient to keep Saddam Hussein's enemies at bay.

"Because much of its repair/rebuild infrastructure received little or no damage during the war, Baghdad has been actively repairing its ground equipment," the DIA noted in a classified assessment. "The Iraqis appear to have an adequate supply of munitions supplemented by production from undamaged ammunition plants and damaged facilities that have been rebuilt. Moreover, Baghdad has started reconstructing its artillery production facilities, and portions of its military electronics production plants may be operational."  

Just as Iraq sought to rebuild its military capability, it repaired much of the civilian damage. The damage done to Iraq's electrical grid was repaired far more quickly than the West anticipated. The Al Hartha plant near Basra, for example, was rebuilt in 270 days, less than three years originally projected by the Iraqis.

In January 1992, the Pentagon completed a report on Iraqi war crimes, which alleged that 1,082 Kuwaitis had been killed by execution and torture during the Iraqi occupation. The report also stated that Iraq had abused all the prisoners of war it captured, making a special effort to ferret out Jewish prisoners. Iraq also damaged the environment by releasing oil into the Persian Gulf and destroying Kuwaiti oil wells. But the Bush administration never released the Pentagon report, thus avoiding focusing attention to the fact that Saddam Hussein was still in power and that there was little Washington could do to bring him to justice.

Finally, a year and a half after the Bush administration decided not to help the Shiites in the south, it reversed itself and imposed a no-flight zone in southern Iraq to protect the Shiites from air attack and demonstrate that Iraq would not have full sovereignty over its territory as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power. But unlike the enclave for the Kurds, the measure fell short of what was needed to protect the Shiites. Circumventing the flight ban, the Iraqi army began draining the marshes in the Euphrates valley and used its ground troops to press the
attacks on the Shiites. More than 10,000 Shiites had sought refuge in Saudi refugee camps after the war. Although some were resettled in the United States, Amnesty International later reported that many had been repatriated to Iraq by the Saudis against their will.19

In its last weeks in power, the Bush administration engaged in a series of attacks on Iraqi air defense sites and on a military factory in Baghdad that made components for Iraq’s nuclear program after Baghdad challenged the no-flight zones in northern and southern Iraq and sought to block demands for United Nations weapons inspections. But the style of the allied military attacks communicated caution as much as strength. The tit-for-tat strikes bore little resemblance to the punishing, all-out, day-and-night attacks of the Gulf War. The strikes were not militarily decisive, nor were they always well planned. Much of the operational art that went into the elaborately planned air campaign appeared to have been forgotten.

Wrong about the Iraqi air defenses, CENTCOM’s new commanders — Schwarzkopf, Horner, Glosson, and the other top military officers had either retired or moved on to other assignments — restricted the time the warplanes spent over the targets. The first attack, which was launched on January 13, 1993, against air defense targets in southern Iraq, was compressed into fifteen minutes. By limiting that attack to a single, brief raid, the American planes were forced to lob two laser-guided bombs at once, a procedure that increased the number of errant bombs. Three of the four surface-to-air missile batteries the Americans tried to destroy were missed, forcing the allies to go back almost a week later to hit the targets again.

Even the cruise missile attack against the Za’ Faraniyah complex, which made machinery for Iraq’s nuclear program, launched four days later, sent a mixed message. By launching the attack, the United States showed that it was willing to bring the fighting to the outskirts of the Iraqi capital. But the White House explained that cruise missiles were used because Washington feared that using planes might result in the loss of a pilot, thus highlighting American worry about challenging Iraq’s rebuilt air defenses. And in launching the cruise missile attack on the factory, the Navy failed to coordinate the launches from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf so that the Tomahawk missiles would arrive at the same time. This gave the Iraqis an opportunity to shoot down one of the missiles. It crashed into the al-Rasheed Hotel, destroying part of the structure and giving Baghdad a propaganda coup.

During the 1992 election campaign, candidate Bill Clinton criticized Bush for not pursuing war crimes trials against the Iraqi leaders. But when he was elected, he had no better plan for influencing developments inside Iraq and curtailing the Saddam Hussein regime’s attacks on the Shiites than did his predecessor.

Clinton insisted that the sanctions be maintained, against the increasing opposition of France, Turkey, and Russia, and carried on the Bush administration’s pattern of limited strikes. After American intelligence determined that Saddam Hussein had launched a plot to kill former President Bush during a visit to Kuwait, Clinton ordered a cruise missile strike on Baghdad’s intelligence headquarters, which had already been attacked during the war.

The low-intensity military campaign against Saddam Hussein was not without cost. In April 1994, two F-15Gs mistakenly shot down two Army helicopters ferrying allied officers to meet with the Kurds in northern Iraq in one of the military’s worst episodes of friendly fire.

CENTCOM’s lightning war was over. It had been billed as a 100-hour blitz, but three years later it was still an unfinished war.

Recalled Gordon Brown, the foreign service officer who served as Schwarzkopf’s chief foreign policy adviser at CENTCOM, “We never did have a plan to terminate the war.”20
18: FRAGPLAN 7

1. See Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, pp. 438–39. Prior to the ground war, Schwarzkopf went to see Yeosock, who had been hospitalized with pneumonia and a gallbladder condition. Schwarzkopf explained that Yeosock needed to be sent to Germany for surgery and that Waller would serve as the Third Army commander in the meantime. “Yeosock did not say a word,” Schwarzkopf wrote. “Tears ran down his cheeks.”

2. Interview, Arnold. Also see videocassette of the Third Army Command Center, declassified by Pentagon at the authors’ request.


4. Interviews, Franks and Chirie.


6. The entombing of the Iraqi soldiers is described in a chronology prepared by the 1st Infantry Division. It noted that “over 500 enemy prisoners were captured, who were broken in spirit and readily surrendered to our leader brigades. Some 150 enemy soldiers, those chosen to resist, were plowed under their trench lines by tanks equipped with mine plows and M9 ACRs.” The chronology is entitled “Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Chronology of Events,” March 14, 1991, at Rawdatayn, Kuwait, and is classified “secret.” According to a report by the VII Corps—“Operation Desert Storm: A Fire Support Perspective”—the military used overwhelming firepower to attack the front-line defenses facing the American army units. Between February 20 and 23, the Air Force launched thirteen B-52 attacks, dropping 754 750-pound bombs for a total of 365500 pounds. It also dropped surrender leaflets followed by two 15000-pound bombs. The artillery preparation was as fierce. Between February 20 and 23, 4200 rounds and 1600 rockets were fired into the breach area. In the 30-minute prep before the attack, 6136 rounds and 414 rockets were fired there.


9. This is drawn from “The Gulf War: An Iraqi General Officer’s Perspective.”


11. Interview, Holder.


13. Interview, General McFarlin.


15. Interview, Cherrie.

16. This account is based on interviews with Schwarzkopf and VII Corps officers.

17. XVIII Airborne Corps, Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, Briefing Book, Major General Scholes, Deputy Commanding General.

19: “THE GATE IS CLOSED”


2. 101st Airborne Division command history, p. 59: “The division was fortunate not to lose any soldiers in another incident on the 27th. The division Assault Command Post (ACP) had arrived at Objective Tim by air in the night. In the morning, they realized they had set down in the middle of a cluster bomb unit minefield. They carefully relocated. No one was injured.”

3. Interviews, Schwarzkopf and Powell.

4. Interview, Pete Williams.

5. Interview, McCaffrey.


8. Interview, Glosson.


A widely circulated account, Triumph Without Victory (Times Books, 1992), by the staff of U.S. News and World Report, holds that the dropping of the GBU-28 was an attempt to kill Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein was a target of opportunity, but senior Air Force generals say that they had no reason to think he was at the Tall command post when the order was given to attack. To the contrary, the Iraqi leader was believed to be hiding out in a bunker in Baghdad. But downtown Baghdad was an unlikely first target for an experimental 5,000-pound bomb.

11. Interview, Horner.

12. “Gulf War Air Power Survey.”

13. The placement of the fire support coordination line north of the Euphrates is discussed in an oral history with Col. Michael F. Reavy prepared by the Tactical Air Command, USAF Air Warfare Center. Reavy was sharply critical of the Army for seeking to move the coordination line north. He said:

The Army would attempt to coordinate an FSCL move with us without really thinking through the impact what that was going to do with our campaign and our ability to support them. . . . The Army was moving FSCL well out past where they were going to impact on anything it seemed to us, and when they did that, they took airspace and ground area for us to
hit... They did not have anybody out there that could coordinate with us, so those areas, in essence, wound up not being hit... I made a note in the big green log that General Horner kept that, at one point in time, the safest place for an Iraqi to be was just behind the FSCIL because we couldn't hit it... By the time that we realized how bad off we were regarding the Army working on the FSCIL stuff, the war was over.

The VII Corps's request to move the FSCIL to east of the coastal road is based on interviews with Air Force officers. Also see "8th Air Support Operations Group After Action Review, Operations Desert Shield/Storm," which notes that "an error to the conservative prematurely pushed the FSCIL beyond the strategic road between Kuwait and Basra the last evening of the ground battle."

The differences between the Army and the Air Force over the coordination line are also discussed in "The Fire Support Coordination Line: Is It Time to Reconsider Our Doctrine?" a thesis presented to the faculty of the Army Command and General Staff College by David H. Zook III, Maj., USA (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1992). Also see Maj. John M. Fawcett, Jr., "Which Way to the FEBA (And FSCIL, FLOT, Troops in Contact, Etc.)?" USAF Weapons Review, Fall 1992.


15. In her memoirs (The Downing Street Years, HarperCollins, 1993, p. 828), Mrs. Thatcher wrote:

One of my very abiding regrets is that I was not there to see the issue through. The failure to disarm Saddam Hussein and to follow through the victory so that he was publicly humiliated in the eyes of his subjects and Islamic neighbors was a mistake which stemmed from the excessive emphasis placed right from the start on international consensus. The opinion of the U.N. counted for too much and the military objective of defeat for too little. And so Saddam Hussein was left with the standing and the means to terrorize his people and foment more trouble. In war there is much to be said for magnanimity in victory. But not before victory.

16. The White House account is based on the notes of a participant.


Bush said that Baker would be traveling to the Middle East for consultations on the peace process and outlined the following conditions for maintaining the ceasefire.

Iraq must release immediately all coalition prisoners of war, third country nationals, and the remains of all who have fallen. Iraq must also ensure prompt and full cooperation in the removal of all weapons of mass destruction, including Iraq’s cooperation in the destruction of suspected weapons sites in its territory. Iraq must ensure that international military observers can access areas of suspected weapons sites. Iraq must fulfill its obligations under the 1973 Middle East Peace Treaty and the 1991 Gulf Peace Treaty, and Iraq must fulfill its obligations under the 1991 United Nations Security Council resolutions 661 and 662. Iraq must also fulfill its obligations under the 1991 United Nations Security Council resolution 687.

The coalition calls upon the Iraqi government to designate military commanders to meet within 48 hours with their coalition counterparts at a place in the theater of operations to be specified to arrange for military aspects of the cease-fire. Further, I have asked Secretary of State Baker to request that the United Nations Security Council meet to formulate the necessary arrangements for this war to be ended.

This suspension of offensive combat operations is contingent upon Iraq’s not firing upon any coalition forces and not launching Scud missiles against any other country. If Iraq violates these terms, coalition forces will be free to resume military operations.

At every opportunity, I have said to the people of Iraq that our quarrel was not with them but instead with their leadership and above all Saddam Hussein. This remains the case. You, the people of Iraq, are not our enemy. We do not seek your destruction. We have treated your POWs with kindness. Coalition forces fought this war only as a last resort and look forward to the day when Iraq is led by people prepared to live in peace with their neighbors.

We must now begin to look beyond victory and war. We must meet the challenge of securing the peace. In the future, as before, we will consult with our coalition partners. We’ve already done a good deal of thinking and planning for the postwar period, and Secretary Baker has already begun to consult with our coalition partners on the region’s challenges.

The war is now behind us. Ahead of us is the difficult task of securing a potentially historic peace.

17. Written response to questions on the Gulf War. In his response, Bush also gives a somewhat different account, saying it was Schwarzkopf, not the White House, that asked for a few additional hours to pursue the war, making the land offensive a 100-hour war. Bush also wrote: "On the last day of the war, I was debating this very issue with my advisors in the Oval Office. There was a genuine sentiment that we had accomplished our objectives, but I asked General Powell to call General Schwarzkopf. He did so immediately from the secure phone on my desk. Schwarzkopf concurred that our objective had been met and a cease-fire was appropriate, but asked for a few more hours to clean up a few loose ends. On that basis, the conflict was ended."


19. Interview, Schwarzkopf.

20. Interview, McCaffrey.


23. Interview, Capt. Mike Russell.

24. Interview, Waller.

25. Interview, Schwarzkopf.

26. Interview, Kern.

27. Interview, Arnold.
28. Interview, Cherrie, VII Corps officer.
29. Interview, McCaffrey.

20. "I SURVIVED DESERT STORM"
   1. Interview, Iraqi Shiite leaders.
   2. Transcripts of radio broadcasts, prepared by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.
   3. Interviews, McCaffrey, Kern, and LeMoyne. Also see 24th Mechanized Infantry Division Combat Team, Historical Reference Book, Compiled at Fort Stewart, April 1991.
   4. Interview, VII Corps officer.
   5. The exchange between Schwarzkopf and his top commanders is reflected in several memoranda for the record, "Situation at Safwan 1 March," prepared by top Army commanders.

One memo recounts the following conversation between Yeosock and Schwarzkopf:

10:45, ARCENT commander called CENTCOM Chief of Staff, said tell CINC orders to destroy radars had not been followed. . . . LTC Wilson requested Iraqis withdraw from area. So far not done. Did not destroy radars because of delicate situation. CINC directed BG Carter to get Iraqi vehicles to withdraw. CINC mission to find a place in Iraq where we can bring the Iraqis to humiliate Iraqi forces at the negotiations by being in an area under our control.

Another memo recounts the following conversation between Schwarzkopf and Yeosock:

13:36 ARCENT Commander discusses situation with the CINC: If Iraqi brigade will not withdraw as we request commit overwhelming force to surround them. Use attack helicopters. Talk to him, and capture him if he refuses to withdraw. If he attacks you return fire.

CINC: May not happen immediately.
COMMANDER: Do not know size of enemy force total. Only provided what has been reported. Iraqi commander says they are in dug-in positions and have been there for a long time. (I did not say that they had been feeding the Iraqis.) CINC: Want them to withdraw or bring into custody. Ordered by the JCS. COMMANDER: Finding another place in Iraq at this time.
CINC: Too late for that. JCS upset that road junction was not taken. Briefed to the White House. Must straighten out quickly.
CINC: Don't want any Iraqis near the location. Try to do it by show of force to capture them or get them to withdraw. A delicate situation. Must get them to withdraw, if needed will do so myself. Want someone to do it smart, not stupid. Want to be posted.
CINC: Ensure the LTG Franks understands the mission; not sure of his ability to understand mission. Therefore, make sure you tell MG Rhamel. Tell Iraqi general that if he doesn't withdraw then he will be captured.

Critical to the security of our mission. Must accomplish without a shot fired. Get the force on the ground ASAP.
COMMANDER: My mission is to go into the Safwan Safreh airfield with overwhelming combat power to surround the Iraqi force, to have the Iraqi force withdraw, be captured . . . without the use of offensive operation. We'll need to have help determining size of the enemy force.
CINC: Have an entire corps to work with. Use attack helicopters.

8. Interview, Scowcroft.
9. Interview, Wolfowitz.
10. Interview, Glosson.
11. Interview, Shites.
12. Schwarzkopf’s support for a rapid withdrawal from the Gulf is clear in the after-action report he sent to Cheney in April 1991. In that report, Schwarzkopf wrote:

   War termination: The rapid success of the ground campaign and our subsequent occupation of Iraq were not fully anticipated. Thus, some of the necessary follow-on actions were not ready for implementation. The prolonged occupation of Iraqi territory, necessitated by the absence of a formal cease-fire agreement, has been further complicated by the unforeseen civil unrest that has occurred throughout Iraq since the cessation of hostilities. Documents for war termination need to be drafted and coordinated early. This could well serve to expedite a formal cease-fire agreement, thus minimizing our obligations to take post-war EPWs and care for dislocated civilians. . . . There must be early coordination with a plan developed and approved to allow the rapid withdrawal of the occupying force.

13. The plan, obtained by the authors, contains the following slide:

   The Road to Baghdad, Mission Analysis.
   Specified Task — Attack North of Euphrates River to Control Baghdad.
   Implied Task
   Seize Key Terrain to Control Baghdad
   Cross Euphrates River
   Establish and Secure Theater Locus
   Establish Communications and Coordinate with Insurgents and Kurds
   Prevent Escape of Saddam and Baathist Regime
   Coordinate/Assist SOCCENT [Special Operations forces with the Central Command] with Provision of Arms, Equipment and Training to Insurgents/Kurds with Follow on Training/Advisor Assistance to New Iraqi Army

Another slide covers the planning assumptions.
14. Concern over the fragmentation of Iraq was reflected in this memo by Zalmay Khalilzad, the director of policy planning, to Wolfowitz.

Subject: Winning the War ... and the Peace: Adaptive Strategies in Case of War with Iraq.

It is possible that once war begins Iraqi nationalists in the armed forces might see the fate of their country at risk because of his reckless ambition and might move against Saddam to save their country. It is not out of the question that even Saddam's Takritis might decide to turn on him. They might calculate that if another group overthrows Saddam they all would be collectively at risk. It is possible that defeat in Kuwait can lead to the unraveling of his regime. The regime's internal security apparatus -- which we should target -- is very effective and feared. The degradation of this apparatus can itself encourage those opposed to Saddam to move against him . . . The new regime will require external assistance in repairing the damage done to it by war and it will need food and medicine. It might well seek our assistance. We should respond positively and seek to develop a good relationship with the new Iraqi government . . .

There is a danger that the overthrow might be followed by more substantial instability and chaos. This can happen if the armed forces disintegrate and different factions fight each other. Ethnic groups such as the Kurds might declare independence from Iraq. Iraq's neighbors such as Iran, Syria, and even Turkey might either seize parts of Iraqi territory or establish governments to their liking in areas adjacent to them -- in effect partitioning Iraq into several countries. The most dangerous of these would be the Iraqi occupation of any part of Iraqi territory. And, should Syria and Turkey take over parts of Iraq, it is likely to be very difficult to stop the Iranians from doing the same.

The partitioning of Iraq will not serve our long-term interests. Iraqi disintegration will improve prospects for Iranian domination of the Gulf and remove a restraint on Syria. It will sow the seeds for future wars. Should Iraq forces begin to disintegrate, we might become the principal power interested in maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity. We will need a strategy for deterring Iraq's neighbors from invading it while waiting for the Iraqis to sort things out for themselves. We might well have to be prepared to deploy U.S.-led allied military units to parts of Iraq where they will not be in a hostile local environment and can deter Iraq's regional rivals from partitioning it. Sending Arab forces to establish order would not be a good idea. The Iraqis are likely to resent that more than if we go in, since other Arabs have their own rivalries with Iraq and these will further complicate the issue.

15. President Bush's written response to Questions Regarding the Persian Gulf War, June 13, 1994. The full text of Bush's response reads:

While some of the escaped Iraqi forces were apparently used against the Shiites in the south, most of the forces employed were those not engaged in the conflict in Kuwait. It was never our goal to break up Iraq. Indeed, we did not want that to happen, and most of our coalition partners (especially the Arabs) felt even stronger on the issue. I did have a strong feeling that the Iraqi military, having been led to such a crushing defeat by Saddam, would rise up and rid themselves of him. We were concerned that the uprisings would sidetrack the overthrow of Saddam, by causing the Iraqi military to rally around him to prevent the breakup of the country. That may have been what actually happened.

I prefer not to comment on the helicopter question except to note that, as it was, helicopters were not significantly involved in the fighting against the Shiites at that time. When the Iraqis did begin to use helicopters against the Shiites in a big way, the following year, I got from the Security Council a ban on Iraqi flights in the southern zone, to match that imposed in the north to protect the Kurds.

Bush's statement is not precisely correct. When the Bush Administration imposed a flight ban in the south, it cited previous U.N. Security Resolutions urging Iraq not to repress its people, but the Security Council did not specifically approve the ban.

16. The Defense Intelligence Agency's March 1991 assessment, entitled "Iraq's Nuclear Program," reads as follows:

Saddam Hussein's plan to acquire nuclear weapons has been slowed, not halted, and Iraqi leaders are firmly committed to rejuvenating it. Should sanctions and intrusive U.N. inspections cease, Iraq could produce a nuclear weapon in 2 to 4 years.

Had the Persian Gulf war not occurred, Iraq could have produced its first nuclear weapon in early 1993. Iraq began a nuclear program in the early 1970's.

Despite sanctions, Baghdad can easily reestablish procurement networks or create new ones -- many front companies are small, unstaffed offices. So far, Iraqi agents apparently have not reestablished a network in Europe. Instead, they are using Jordanian firms as front companies through which nuclear-related goods could be transferred to Iraq via Jordan's free-trade zones.

Iraq continues to administer the largest and most capable concentration of nuclear scientists in the Arab world. Some 2,000 mostly foreign-trained Iraqi scientists and engineers and 18,000 technicians are posed to resurrect the Iraq nuclear program as soon as conditions allow. Although the existing scientific cadre is large enough to support progress at a reduced rate, post-war efforts to train and recruit nuclear scientists suggest that Iraq needs even more personnel to sustain a long-term nuclear weapon program. In the wake of known defections and information leaks, Saddam Hussein almost certainly has intensified already-tight security measures to prevent scientists from escaping . . .
shelter in Saudi Arabia after the war were arrested, tortured, killed or forcibly returned to Iraq,” the report notes.


EPILOGUE


3. Interview, Schwarzkopf.


The “Gulf War Air Power Survey” contradicted much of what Hallion wrote in his own book, Storm Over Iraq (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992). In his memo, Hallion wrote that he was “increasingly concerned that the actual accomplishments of airpower in the Gulf War will be distorted or misinterpreted by the upcoming GWAPS report in much the same way that the lessons learned and the accomplishments of airpower in the Second World War were distorted by the Strategic Bombing Survey. Further there is the potentiality that even the positive statements that the GWAPS report states will be gradually lost in much the same way that those of the USSBS [U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey] were in the 1950’s.”

Hallion urged that the Air Force “seriously consider the implications of releasing this report.”


Acknowledgments

When we began our research for The Generals' War four years ago, we knew that the book would be a large undertaking.

From the start, our hope was to understand how each of the services planned and fought the war — and how those plans did and did not fit together. To the extent possible, we planned to cite our sources on the record and to draw on classified and unclassified documentation.

To try to get at the “ground truth” of the war, we interviewed administration officials, diplomats, allied military officers, and intelligence experts, some more than a dozen times.

Many senior commanders and planners were interviewed in Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf states during the planning for the war. They were also interviewed during the war and in the conflict’s immediate aftermath when the coalition forces occupied southern Iraq and were deployed in Kuwait. To prepare our account, we visited some of the main battle sites, talked to the airmen, soldiers, Marines, and sailors who did the fighting.

Away from the battlefield, we conducted numerous after-action interviews at military bases throughout the United States and Europe. In Washington, we talked to a broad range of policy-makers at the Pentagon, the White House, the State Department, and the various intelligence agencies.

We also interviewed foreign diplomats and talked to Iraqi Shiite leaders and refugees in their exile in Europe and in southern Iraq, as they fled the Iraqi onslaught after the war.